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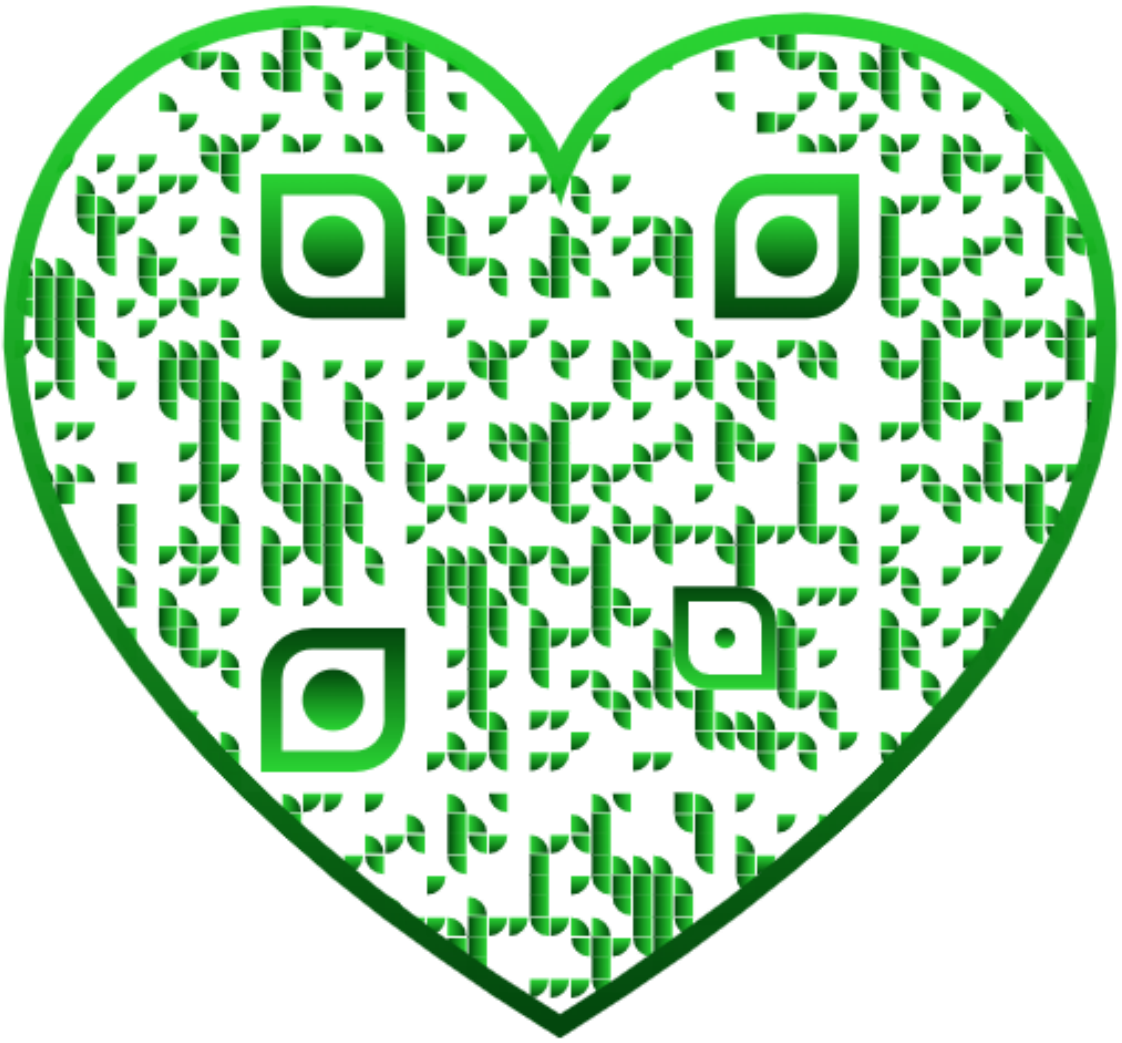

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Promised Land

In recent times, we've all expressed our sadness at the passing of famous musicians on an alarmingly regular basis, but when the news broke about the death of Chuck Berry it felt different somehow – this is a man whose contribution to popular music merits a duckwalking, Gibson-toting statue at the summit of its Mount Rushmore.

Reports of Berry's death at the age of 90 began to circulate just hours before the magazine went to press, so there's no tribute article in this issue – an account of his life and times will appear next month – but let's take a moment to honour the extraordinary musical legacy of a genuine trailblazer who sketched out the rock 'n' roll roadmap so artfully for others to follow.

The intro riff in 1958's *Johnny B Goode* (a revved-up take on Louis Jordan's *Ain't That Just Like A Woman* from 1946) is often cited as year zero for millions of guitarists, but it's important to remember that Chuck was a wonderful lyricist, too, described by Bob Dylan as "the Shakespeare of rock 'n' roll". The rich array of characters, places and gleaming machines race past in his songs like billboards on a highway – it's little wonder that so many fledgling musicians on this side of the pond found his vignettes of American teenage life so evocative. In inspiring the likes of Lennon and Richards, Chuck was a hero to those who would become heroes themselves. Chuck Berry's automobile ride wasn't without a few unexpected twists, turns and unsavoury episodes along the way, but it's impossible to imagine what the last 60 years of guitar-driven music would have been like without his towering influence.

Another journey that I must mention concerns *G&B*'s managing editor Gary Walker, who is leaving us to edit our sister magazine *Long Live Vinyl*. Gary has been instrumental in the award-winning relaunch of *G&B* over the last two years – congratulations and good luck, mate, it really wouldn't have been the same without you.

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Turn to **page 18** to take advantage of this month's special *Guitar & Bass* subscription offer.

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 8.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.

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G&B is granted an exclusive audience with one of the world's most mysterious Les Pauls – the 'stripped' Burst played by Paul Kossoff at the Isle Of Wight Festival in 1970

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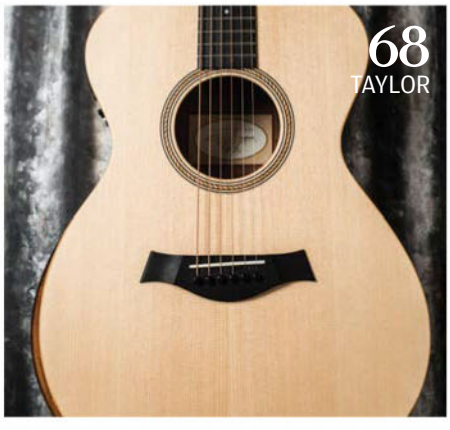
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Opening bars...

Emerging talent on *G&B*'s radar and a chance to win a whole pedalboard's worth of Keeley effects

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Who founded Keeley Engineering?

a) Richard Keeley

b) Robert Keeley

c) Keeley Hawes

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ONES TO WATCH

Holly MacVe

Holly MacVe was born in Ireland and raised in Yorkshire, but the classic sounds of her debut album *Golden Eagle*, released in March, are from another age and continent. The 20-year-old's yearning country laments and towering vibrato evoke great American vocalists such as Tammy Wynette and Gillian Welch – and modern-day alt-country artists Sharon Van Etten, Cat Power and Marissa Nadler – and she's a pretty handy guitarist, too.

"Ever since I remember, there were always people playing music around me, and so it was always a very natural thing for me to pursue," she tells *G&B* of her childhood, growing up surrounded by her mother's Bob Dylan and classic blues records. "My mum played a lot of Irish fiddle music and blues tunes, and my grandad was a classical composer. I always looked up to them.

"I was still a teenager when writing a lot of the songs on *Golden Eagle*, moving in to my twenties. For some reason, I've always struggled with growing up and the passing of time, and I think that was a theme I subconsciously explored a lot, especially as I was reaching adulthood – well sort of...

"I picked up a guitar for the first time at the age of around 9 or 10. For me, it was always a tool for songwriting and to accompany my voice. I was exposed to a lot of old blues music, such as Big Bill Broonzy and Muddy Waters, when I was young, and found them very inspiring. One of my all-time favourite guitar players is Dave Rawlings. It's really emotive playing, I love that."

Despite spending most of her life in Yorkshire, and absorbing the sounds of American music, MacVe's Irish roots remain important – and an influence on her songwriting.

"Although I can't remember my time in Ireland, I still feel a strong connection with the music," she says. "My mum gave birth to me with Martin Hayes playing in the background, so I sort of feel like Irish fiddle music is ingrained in my soul... I'm actually trying to learn the fiddle at the moment – and I'm making some horrible noises."

Golden Eagle, which was has been racking up airplay on BBC Radio 2 and 6 Music alike, was recorded with Lanterns On The Lake guitarist and *G&B* Test Pilot Paul Gregory handling production in his home studio in Newcastle. MacVe's Bella Union label mate also contributed slide guitar on several tracks, namely the haunting *No One Has The Answers*, using an Eastwood Airline Coronado into a Vox AC30 with bags of reverb.

Holly's main guitar on the record was a home-built acoustic made by her step father, while she also borrowed a valuable Martin from Bella Union founder Simon Raymonde. Live, she's been using a different acoustic, notably when supporting John Grant at the Hammersmith Apollo and completing a highly in-demand visit to the SXSW festival in Austin, Texas.

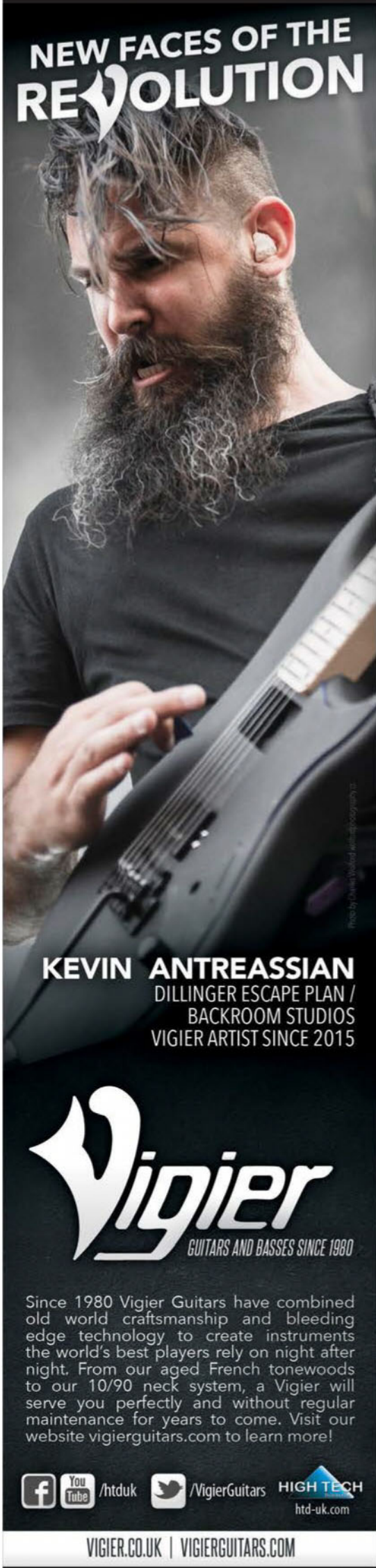
"It was pretty mental... I played nine shows in four days. You never know quite what to expect when it comes to sound and venues, so you sort of have to just roll with it and have fun. I love Austin, so it was great to hang out there again.

"On stage, lately I've been enjoying playing a Gibson LG-2 American Eagle acoustic, and I'm loving the Mr Black Super Moon reverb."

MacVe admits to feeeling a sense of relief at finally completing her debut album after a lengthy gestation period. "Some of the songs are two or three years old, so it's nice to be able to finally let go of them in a sense, and share them with other people," she says. "The record took a while to finish, but I'm glad we spent that extra time with it, as it was important for me to live with the songs and get to know them as much as possible before putting them out there.

"Paul was incredible! He understood the vibe immediately when hearing the songs for the first time, and from then we just developed on the sound together. Paul is a very talented guy and a lovely one, too. It was a very relaxed experience really, we drank a hell of a lot of tea!" **GW**

TRY IF YOU LIKE Gillian Welch, Sharon Van Etten



Letters from America

Inspired by Fender's timeless slab-body design, Jason Z Schroeder's Chopper TL is sure to appeal to Tele addicts. **DAVE HUNTER** tunes in

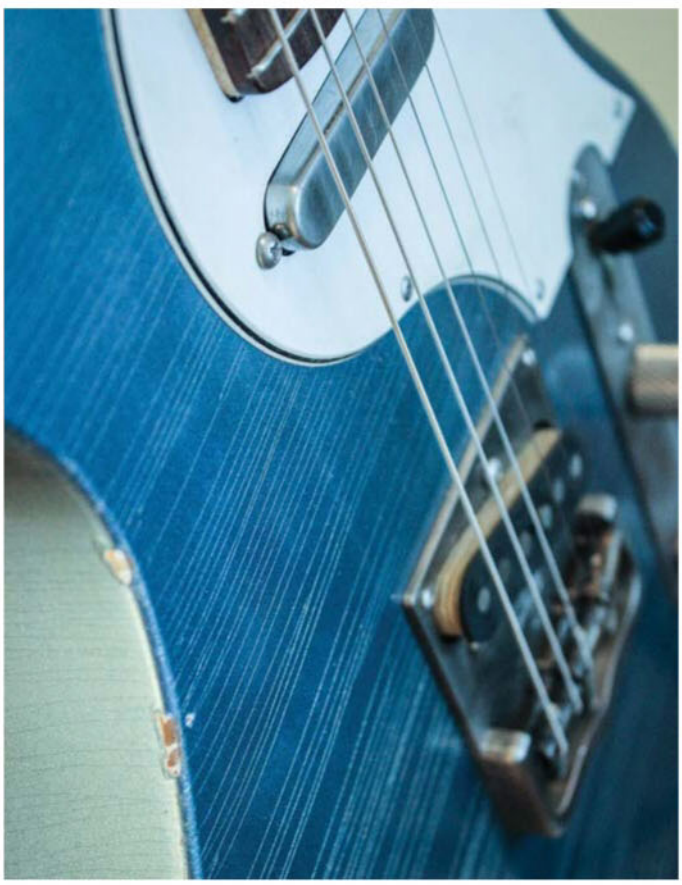
DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

Guitar journalists are fond of calling the Stratocaster 'the most imitated electric guitar ever designed', but I'm not so sure the Telecaster hasn't taken over from its younger sibling. The thing is, give the blueprint a little twist and 'imitated' becomes 'appealingly re-imagined', and with that this tried-and-true model earns a vibrant new lease of life.

In the high-end market alone, we've seen worthy homages from the likes of Johan Gustavsson, Ron Thorn, Gil Yaron, Dennis Fano and several others, all of whom have taken that hallowed Tele template and done something a little more original with the body shape – and often a lot more original with the final render, giving serious reconsideration to virtually every aspect of the build.

Jason Z Schroeder of Redding, California, has shown us once again just how worthy of adaptation the iconic bolt-neck single cut in his Chopper TL model is. You know immediately what you're looking at, yet the body lines depart enough from the original blueprint that it feels entirely fresh and the components, specifications and other fine points of the build coalesce to take the guitar to very new – and I'd add, elevated – territory.



Premier league

If you're at all familiar with Schroeder, chances are it's in light of his former association with Premier Builders Guild (PBG), which he became part of around its inception in 2009, and left in 2012 in order to retain full artistic control of his company. And if you've seen one of his guitars before, it's likely it was one of his notable set-neck models – the Edge Doublecut (a PBG staple during those years), or the Radio Lane Standard or Flattop, for example. In addition to these finely crafted instruments, however, Schroeder has earned a good reputation for the hardware he makes in-house, the most recognisable of which is probably the distinctive adjustable wrap-tail bridge with 'stinger' peak at its rear, a solid and brilliantly designed component that other makers have made good use of on their own guitars.

As a slab-bodied bolt-neck, the Chopper TL is a little different from what we might have labeled Schroeder's forte, and also more affordable. On the evidence of this review sample, though, it's a beautifully honed instrument

KEY FEATURES

Jason Z. Schroeder Chopper TL

- **PRICE** $2,800 (approx £2,225, plus shipping and any duties)
- **CONTACT** jasonzschroederguitars.com, jzsguitars@charter.net
- **BODY** Solid Shasta pine
- **NECK** Bolt-on maple neck with rounded 'just right' profile (0.86"–0.96")
- **FINGERBOARD** Indian rosewood, 9.5" radius, 25.5" scale length
- **FRETS** 22 medium stainless steel
- **NUT** Hand-shaped bone
- **PICKUPS** Nordstrand NVT Alnico III T-style set
- **ELECTRONICS** Master volume and tone controls, three-way switch
- **FINISH** Ice Blue Metallic in distressed nitrocellulose lacquer
- **HARDWARE** Schroeder TL bridge
- **STRINGS** Ernie Ball .010"–.046"

nonetheless, and it comes replete with plenty to help it stand out from the crowd. This one has a body of Shasta pine, an alternative (and sustainable) tonewood that Schroeder likes to use as standard in this model, although it's also available in ash or alder. If you ask me, stick with the pine: it yields a light guitar that still feels entirely solid, and one that seems to ring with its own rich and unique voice, too.

"The Shasta pine is from a local source," Schroeder tells us. "It has some qualities of swamp ash but is a lot more lively, with vibrant overtones. It is also a great weight and finishes well. It just makes for a really expressive guitar. It has good bite when you dig in, but you can mellow it out with touch sensitivity and the tone and volume controls."

Schroeder has dressed this one in a thin Ice Blue Metallic finish in nitrocellulose lacquer, which has been creatively distressed to represent a well-weathered instrument. People's opinions on the whole 'relic'ing thing' vary greatly, but I love the look and feel of this one. The ageing is extremely crafty, resulting in what I'd say is very realistic playing wear. The narrowly spaced parallel checking lines running across the body from tail-pin to neck look superb, and pick up nifty refractions of light within their tiny fault lines, spraying them back via the lacquer's metallic element, and creating an effect that varies depending how you angle the guitar. Truly artistic stuff, I'd say.

The neck is made from rock maple with an Indian rosewood fingerboard, done out in a profile that Schroeder calls his "just right" carve. I couldn't argue with that. The rounded C feels great in the hand, and it's plenty full at 0.86" at the first fret and 0.96" at the 12th, yet without feeling clubby or imposing. It's another aspect of this neck, though, that makes the Chopper TL feel very different from the standard T-type right from the first grab: with a width at the (hand-shaped bone) nut of 1 11/16" rather than the traditional Fender 1 5/8", it's heftier overall in the left hand – something I really like in this one, and just another subtle element that moves this guitar into fresh territory. Add to that the 22 stainless steel frets – all immaculately polished – and the engraved model and brand logos on the headstock, and it's a quality appendage for sure.

Time for T

The pickups are a T-style set made to vintage specs with Alnico III magnets, wound for Schroeder by Nordstrand, a Californian maker better known for its bass pickups. The neck unit measures a fairly traditional 5.9k ohms, while the bridge is the hotter version of this NVT A3 set at about 7.35k ohms. The latter is set into Schroeder's own T-style bridge design, which has an elegant die-cast aluminum base with 'stinger' tail and three steel saddles. The controls are the traditional complement, with rugged-feeling knurled knobs and barrel switch tip, and the jack plate is Schroeder's own 'S' design.

The Chopper TL probes all the sonic corners you'd expect a Tele to nail, with a little extra girth and chime

Tested through a modified tweed Deluxe-style combo and a custom Marshall 2204-style head with 2x12" cab, the Chopper TL delivered no particular surprises in that it easily probed all the sonic corners you'd expect a good Tele to nail, but did so with a little extra available girth and chime, too, and a sweetly textured high end that was never too harsh, but ready to shimmer and jangle when required.

Leaning toward the beefier side of vintage, the bridge pickup enables both meaty twang via the combo and some chunky grind through the semi-cranked EL34-equipped head, providing a quick reminder of how Jimmy Page fooled us into thinking he was playing so many of those early *Led Zeppelin I* and *II* solos on a Les Paul, when in fact it was very often his Telecaster screaming and wailing.

The Chopper TL couches its sonic versatility in an easy playability that requires you to 'fight it' less than you do some vintage-style Teles (a feeling I've often appreciated, but one that I'm fine living without), and I really enjoy how the neck's dimensions yield a little more room to roam. This thing just feels great in the hand, too – and, in fact, the overall quality and playability remind me a lot of the couple of Johan Gustavsson Fullerblasters that I've had a chance to try, which is really saying something in Schroeder's favour given that the Swedish luthier's masterful modified-T-style sells for more than twice the asking price of the Chopper TL.

Whether you're a downright Telecaster nut, or a fan of no-nonsense performance guitars that will deliver some classic single-cut twang while easily taking you elsewhere as well, this Schroeder is well worth a look.

The Telecaster-inspired outline of the Chopper TL and its Nordstrand NVT Alnico III T-style pickups make it a seriously cool proposition

READER BOARDS

Less is more for **NEIL SEWELL** since he downsized his two-tier board. He tells us which pedals are essential to his current setup

KIT LIST

Neil Sewell

- **PEDALS IN ORDER** Dunlop Joe Bonamassa Signature Cry Baby Wah, TC Electronic PolyTune Noir Mini 2, DOD Phasor 201, EarthQuaker Devices Hoof, MXR Custom Shop Joe Bonamassa FET Driver, Z.Vex Box of Rock, MXR Carbon Copy, Mr Black Deluxe Plus
- **PATCH CABLES** Diago Patchfactory solderless cables
- **POWER SUPPLY** Pedaltrain Volto rechargeable PSU
- **BOARD TYPE** Pedaltrain Metro 24
- **HEAR IT HERE** www.pinkman.co.uk

What inspired this setup?

"I got fed up lugging around my heavy, two-tier wooden board and wanted to downsize to something with a single row of pedals, while still covering the essentials for my contemporary rock covers band. I was also looking to use my amp's overdriven tone more, so that freed up some space by eliminating some of the three or more drive pedals I was using, and I was keen to investigate rechargeable PSU options to see if I could eliminate the need to get power to the front of the stage."

Tell us a little about the journey...

"I'm a massive fan of the Bigsby vibrato, and tend to end up fitting one to most of my guitars at one point or another, so a solid polyphonic tuner was essential! I also like a proper swampy tremolo, but only really use it for one song, so the Deluxe Plus was a great find, giving me reverb and tremolo in one pedal. The Box of Rock was always going to be my main overdrive – I've tried maybe a dozen others but always come back to it – and the Carbon Copy has been a stalwart of my setup for years. I was previously using a Phase 90 for my modulation needs, but much prefer the subtlety of a two-stage phaser, so when DOD reissued the 201, I snapped one up in no time. The MXR FET Driver was a more recent addition, giving me the option of kicking the BoR into more saturation for solos."

Is there a pedal you'd like to add?

"I'd love to try the new Keeley Monterey fuzz/modulation pedal, although I'm not sure how I'd squeeze it on without giving up my DOD Phasor! There are also at least 10 overdrive pedals that I still need to test out, such as the JTM and Jubilee from Lovepedal."

Which guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"I play a 2005 Gibson Memphis ES-335 and a 2013 Gibson USA Firebird, but both have had pickups replaced: the 335 has WCR Crossroads PAF humbuckers and the Firebird has Shed Pickups Soapstar P-90s. I run the board up-front of a Tone King Majesty [Royalist] 45 head and 2x12 cab. It's a fabulous amp, and I have it running KT66s for a Bluesbreaker vibe. I did have a real Marshall 1962 Bluesbreaker reissue combo, but it just got to be too much of a pain lugging it around."

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"Discovering the Pedaltrain Volto was a key moment: being able to stash this little rechargeable PSU under the board and not worry about running power to the front of the stage has really helped speed up set-up/tear-down times. I must have been through a dozen or so drive pedals, but I always come back to the Box of Rock. It just sounds great, and simply gives me 'more' of what my amp is already doing, as opposed to drastically shifting my tone. Since getting the FET Driver, I don't tend to use the boost side for solos, so there should be a better-orientated pedal that could take its place whilst freeing up valuable space, but I just can't find anything I'm more happy with!"

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, email the details and an image to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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Jarrad Owens

- **TEST INSTRUMENT** PRS S2 Vela (McCarty Tobacco Sunburst)
- **BANDS** Maniac Street Preachers, Supernova (electric duo), Acoustix (acoustic duo)
- **MAIN PEDALS & AMPS USED** Peavey ValveKing 112, Peavey 6505 Plus 112, Randall RDS (Maniac Street Preachers amps, dependant on venue), Line 6 Amplifi FX100 (Supernova)

TEST PILOTS
PRS S2 VELA

As his year with the S2 Vela comes to an end, has Manic Street Preachers tribute band guitarist **JARRAD OWENS** become a PRS convert?

After the best part of a year of jamming, rehearsing and gigging, how does the PRS S2 Vela stack up against the guitars of a vintage gear enthusiast?

It's no big secret that my taste in equipment is like that of a wine connoisseur – go with a classic and let it get better with age. Such is the case with my go-to guitar, my prized 1988 Gibson Les Paul Custom, which like a favourite pair of jeans has worn in with each passing year. As much as I appreciate new guitar designs, with their abundance of R&D time and cunning innovations, I'm often left uninspired at a primal level – perhaps it's something to do with the lack of any association with my guitar heroes, or maybe because I like the vintage vibe of the guitar designs of yore.

I've been constantly impressed by the guitar's adaptability, given the range of material I tend to cover

This is where the Vela is a surprising curveball –it's a fresh design with its appealing offset curves and mix-and-match pickup configuration, but there's something innately familiar about it.

As I mentioned in a previous instalment of my test report, it's something of a Frankenstein-esque combination of design cues from the 1950s, a guitar that never was but could have been – if Paul Reed Smith had been born a few decades earlier.

On a practical level, I've been constantly impressed by the guitar's adaptability, given the range of material I tend to cover. I've been

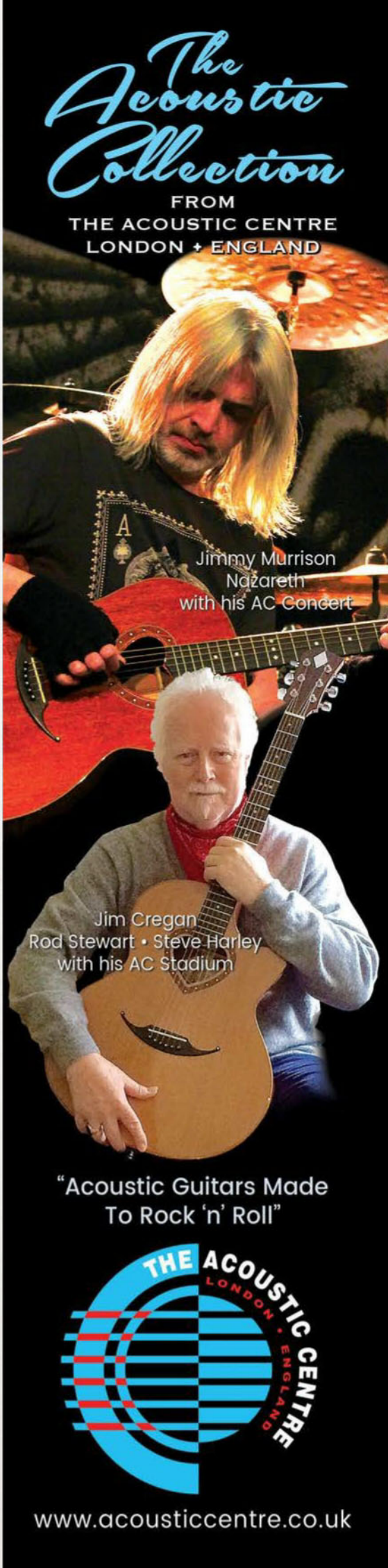
able to make the Vela roar through my Peavey 6505+ in order to deliver the chunky saturated rhythm guitar of the early Manic Street Preachers hits, whilst also managing to obtain the shimmering cleans and honky blues sound of James Bay via a Blackstar HT-5.

The biggest impression made on me by the Vela, however, has been just how comfortable and familiar the neck feels. I'm no cork sniffer when it comes to neck profiles, feeling equally happy playing a skinny Fender neck or the chunkiest '59 Gibson profile; but for once, I've found a neck shape that just... fits. For the first time in my guitar-playing life, I can say that I've experienced no cramp, and no aches and pains in my hands whilst gigging.

I must hold my hands up and say that whilst admiring the work of Paul Reed Smith, an undeniable innovator from the mould of Ted McCarty and Leo Fender, I never thought I'd be a 'PRS guy'. The attention to detail has always been staggering – much like the 10 tops and the exceptional craftsmanship – but sometimes I've struggled to connect with them. The S2 range, though, has the quirky character and personality that speaks to a certain kind of guitar player.

In the 1970s, Gibson – under Norlin – experimented with design departures and it resulted in models such as the L6-S, S-1, Marauder and RD. The Vela feels like a similar left-turn for PRS and will no doubt attract a similar cult following – albeit with better sounds and build quality!

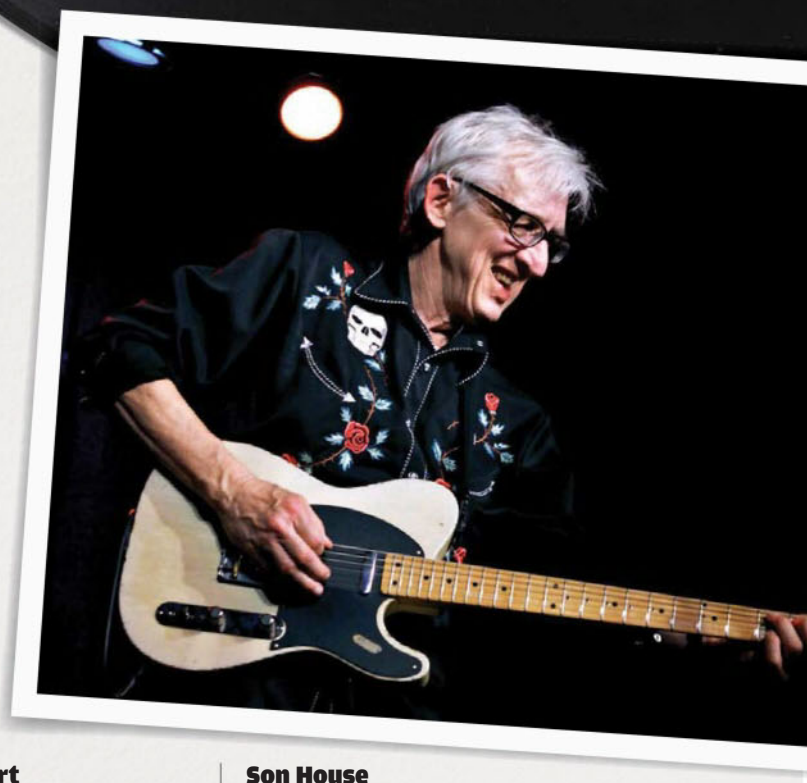
Paul Reed Smith once said: "I tried to make guitars that were close to what my heroes played. That's the way it's done. My experience is that you have to do it like a musician." Mr Smith, you've nailed it! Just like the prized vintage gear that I'm so fortunate to own, this PRS will no doubt get even better with age. Now, if you'll excuse me, this PRS guy has a Vela to play...



SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Bill Kirchen

‘Mr Telecaster’ gives *G&B* a glimpse into his rootsy record collection



Telecaster titan and Commander Cody And His Lost Planet Airmen founder Bill Kirchen, one of the originators of the country-rock genre and a Grammy nominee in 2001, released his latest studio album in August 2016. *Transatlanticana* is a collaboration with former Eggs Over Easy guitarist Austin de Lone, and the duo recently completed a UK tour in support of its release.
For more information on Bill Kirchen, go to www.billkirchen.com

Kenny Ball And His Jazzmen
MIDNIGHT IN MOSCOW

“This was my gateway drug to the great Louis Armstrong Hot Five and Hot Seven sides. It has a big trombone solo (my one instrument at the time) by John Bennett, member of the Jazzmen from the beginning in 1958 until Ball’s death in 2013 – from the womb to the tomb. The sound of the banjo probably caught my ear, as my next stop was the five-string.”

Mississippi John Hurt
FOLK SONGS AND BLUES

“My favourite of all the Piedmont and Delta bluesmen I saw in the mid-60s. I loved his cool songs and sweet vocals, it was so friendly and accessible, not almost scary like Son House. But, mostly, I wanted to play just like that. This is where my guitar adventure began, and I was still using plastic thumb and fingerpicks when I got my first electric guitar a couple of years later.”

Son House
DEATH LETTER

“I saw him at Newport in ’64. He began by announcing his first song in a slow, almost whisper of a voice, and I thought, ‘Well this old geezer is too over the hill to be of any interest’. Then all at once he rolled his eyes up out of sight, slammed a bottleneck up his steel National and let out an unearthly holler. My hair stood straight up on my neck.”

Bob Dylan
THE FREEWHEELIN’ BOB DYLAN

“Dylan played my high school in ’64. I also saw him at the Newport Folk Festival earlier that year, then again in ’65 when he went electric. This was Dylan’s second LP, but the first that I got. Back then, I may not have owned even a dozen albums, so this immediately went into extremely heavy rotation. His first 10 records are burned into my brain. What can I say? He changed everything.”

Various Artists
NEW ORLEANS HOME OF THE BLUES

“Ann Arbor, Michigan blues band The Prime Movers (with my classmate Iggy Osterberg on drums) sang Jessie Hill’s New Orleans classic *Ooh Poo Pah Doo*. Another band member destined for fame, Bob Sheff (‘Blue’ Gene Tyranny) turned me on to this. With cuts by Aaron Neville, Ernie K-Doe and more, it’s a best-of-the-best collection of 60s New Orleans R&B.”

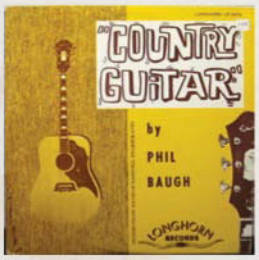
Red Simpson
ROLL, TRUCK, ROLL

“This marked the beginning of my life-long love affair with the Bakersfield, California sound. A contemporary of Buck Owens, Wynn Stewart and Merle Haggard, Red was a successful writer (*Close Up The Honky-Tonks*) as well. With the fantastic but lesser-known Gene Moles on guitar, the whole sound of this record is still ground zero honky-tonk for me.”

Merle Haggard And The Strangers
I’M A LONESOME FUGITIVE

“Forming Commander Cody in ’67, I got a crash course in electric country music, which my folk world still didn’t have much use for back then. Merle was then, and still is, my favourite. I played this over and over again. It was my window into a whole new world. I saw Merle and The Strangers open the show for Buck Owens in 1968. I got my Telecaster within the year.”

Phil Baugh
COUNTRY GUITAR



“This had the hottest electric guitar playing I’d heard at the time, and the title cut, with its spot-on imitations of a half-dozen great country guitarists, paved the way for my *Hot Rod Lincoln* licks medley. Great hardcore country and warp-speed instrumentals. This opened my eyes to the skill level at which the A-team pickers were operating. That’s probably Phil on Merle’s hit *Strangers*.”

Freddie King
FREDDY KING GOES SURFIN’

“Improbably titled, this was really his instrumental *Hide Away* album, repackaged sans artist photo to catch the teen market. Of the three Kings, Freddie grabbed me hardest, with these relentless, driving guitar pieces. Each one has a distinct melodic hook, and Freddie played with such focus and intensity he seemed incapable of ever making even the smallest mistake.”

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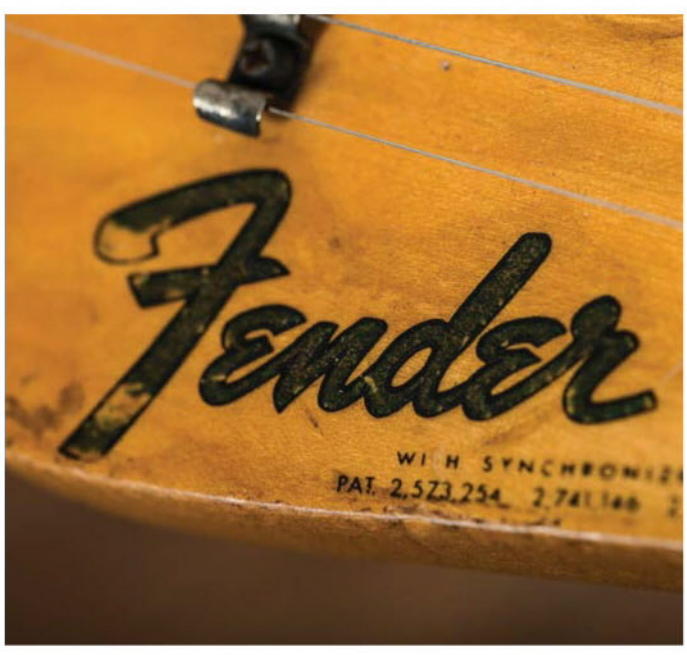
The Money Shot

Who doesn't love a custom-colour Fender? You'd be forgiven for thinking that this Candy Apple Red 1965 Stratocaster has an original finish, but in reality it's been subject to a restoration at the hands of refinishing expert Clive Brown. This example also has retrofit tuners, five replacement bridge saddles and a new volume pot. It recently sold for £4,000 at the Gardiner Houlgate guitar auction in Corsham, Wiltshire (guitar-auctions.co.uk), which is considerably less than an all-original pre-CBS or transition-era Fender would typically fetch on the vintage market. We're firm believers that vintage bargains are still out there if you are looking for a player's guitar that's been subjected to modifications. Visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to hear this lovely old Fender in action...

Fender
STRATOCASTER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Songs Of Yesterday

In 1974, Paul Kossoff's drug problem was spiralling out of control. He sold a number of guitars, including the iconic 'stripped' Les Paul used during Free's Isle Of Wight Festival set. The guitar hasn't seen the light of day since the mid-1990s, but *G&B* was recently granted a world-exclusive audience with one of the most mysterious Bursts of them all. Read on as we look at the instrument in unprecedented detail and explode a few myths along the way...

Story & Photography **Steve Clarke**

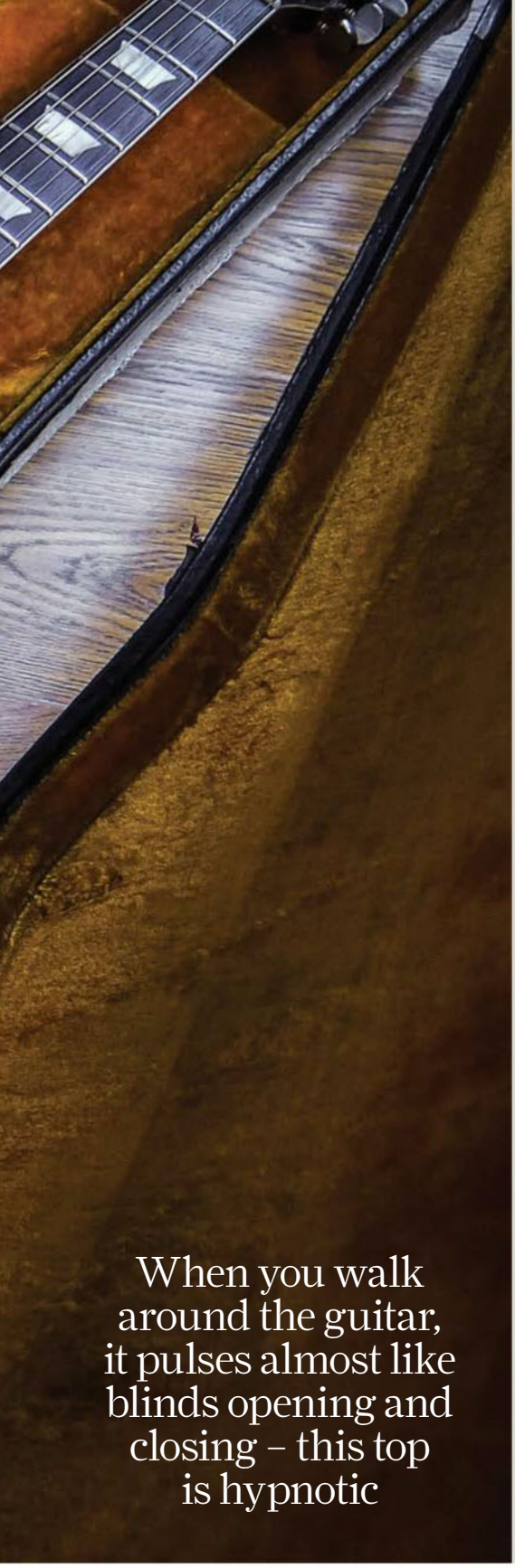
We are led upstairs into the back room of a studio to meet a very special guitar indeed. Following two years of enquiries and negotiations, the owner of the instrument – who wishes to remain anonymous – arrives promptly at this neutral location with two cases. One is the battered original and the other, more sturdy example contains the guitar itself. To our amazement, the owner opens the case containing the guitar and immediately leaves the room for a short while in order for us to become quietly acquainted with it. Only later do we consider the value of this spine-tingling moment, but first a little history...

Of all the guitars that Paul Kossoff subjected to his trademark vibrato during his all-too-brief spell on the planet, it's the Les Paul stripped back to a natural finish that he played at the Isle Of Wight Festival back in 1970 that has been subject to the most speculation. Over the years, opinions have differed >

with regard to whether it started life as a goldtop or a sunburst, and the absence of a serial number – missing following a refinish – has only served to stoke the fire. Was it made in 1958, 1959 or 1960? Is it the *All Right Now* guitar?

The earliest known photograph of Kossoff using this guitar live was taken at the Golf-Drouot nightclub in Paris during shows on 5-7 April 1969. It was also seen in May of that year at Morgan Studios in London, hooked up to a wah-wah, likely during the session for *I'll Be Creepin'* or *Sugar For Mr Morrison*. It would appear again the following year for the *Top Of The Pops* performance of *All Right Now* in June, on the German music show *Beat-Club* on 24 August and at the legendary Isle Of Wight Festival on 30 August.

The recording sessions for Free's third album *Fire And Water,* which yielded *All Right Now,* had taken place in the first half of 1970. At the time, Kossoff could have called on either the stripped Les Paul or the 'darkburst' 1958 Les Paul he'd swapped with Eric Clapton for a three-pickup Les Paul Custom during Free's tour with Blind Faith in the summer of 1969. Which is the *All Right Now* guitar? Kossoff certainly leaned on the stripped Burst while miming his way through the band's biggest hit on *Top Of The Pops*, and his connection with that particular instrument seems evident from footage of Free's aforementioned *Beat-Club* performance. He also chose to use it for the Isle Of Wight show, the biggest gig of the band's career at a festival attended by 600,000 people. Would



When you walk around the guitar, it pulses almost like blinds opening and closing – this top is hypnotic

The battle-scarred lacquer on the headstock fascia is original

the diminutive Kossoff, a man with relatively small hands, have opted to grapple with the larger neck of the darkburst '58 during long studio sessions?

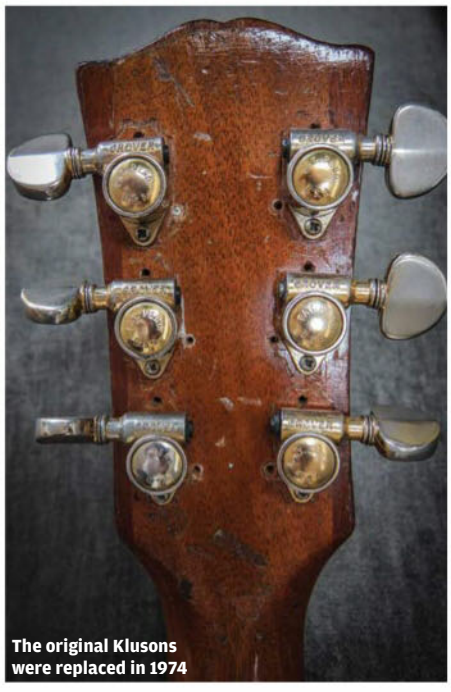
It's well documented that addiction had begun to get the better of Paul Kossoff by 1974. He sold a number of guitars, and one of them found its way to Orange Music in London. That guitar was the stripped Les Paul. It was sold to one Mike Gooch for £500 on 21 September 1974. At the time, the frets were badly worn and Gooch's father gave him an ear-bashing for spending so much money on a beaten-up guitar.

In 1975, a series of modifications were carried out by luthier Dick Knight. The instrument was refretted and refinished around the front but not at the back. The original nickel-plated pickup covers and stopbar tailpiece were replaced with gold-plated hardware. Although the top was refinished, the back was probably only lightly sanded, but the serial number was lost. On 15 June 1975 Kossoff played Fairfield Halls, Croydon with his new outfit Back Street Crawler. Gooch took the stripped Burst backstage to show Kossoff, whose "eyes lit up" as he offered the guitar's new owner £1,000 and a Gibson L5S in exchange for it, but Gooch declined. Some years passed, during which time the instrument was almost stolen during a break-in – but another guitar that was lying on top of the stripped Burst's case was taken instead. A lucky escape indeed.

Gooch eventually decided to sell the guitar, and after it went unsold by Sotheby's >

The back of the instrument is heavily worn

Guess who this case used to belong to...


The original Klusons were replaced in 1974

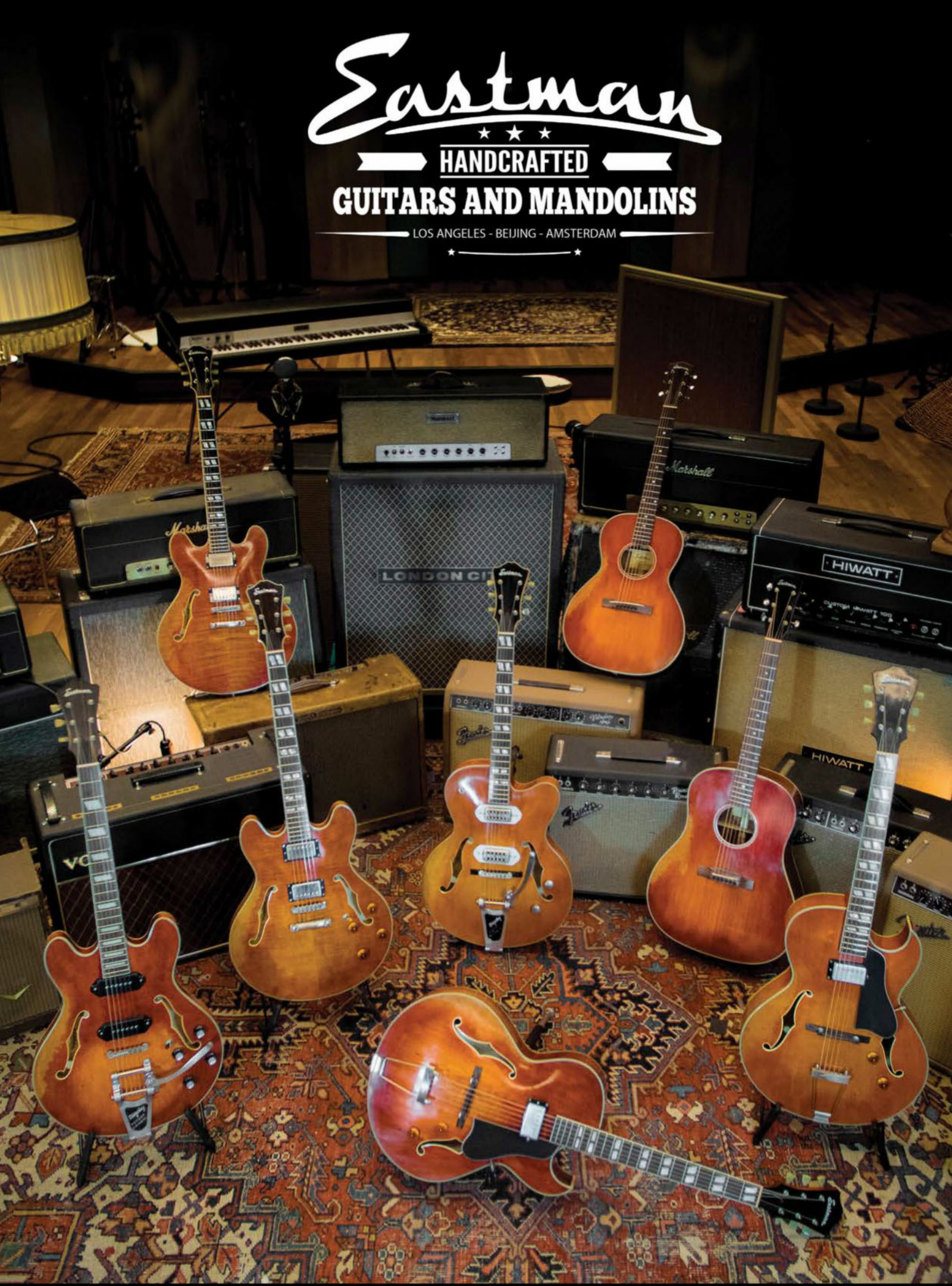
in London in 1993 it was bought for £12,000 at Christie's in May 1994. At the time of sale, the guitar still had a replacement chrome tune-o-matic bridge with retaining wire and nylon saddles. Inside the guitar case was a worn ABR-1 bridge, believed to have bowed under Kossoff's heavy-gauge strings. The bridge was subsequently straightened out in a vice and refitted to match the look of earlier photos. In footage of Free's appearance on *Top Of The Pops*, the saddles are metal (though some say nylon), while both the high- and low-E saddles appear to have been flipped.

Fast-forward to 2017 and the guitar's highly flamed, natural-finish top is breathtaking to behold. Even though the refinish is over four decades old, the top is in very good condition, but the back is a different matter and has remained original since Kossoff used it: the wear is substantial. We place the guitar onto a bench and take a weight measurement of 8.74lbs... it's time to get down to the nitty-gritty.

Bridge

The guitar's ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge measures 83.9x10.76mm. The B-string saddle has been replaced, there's another cut in the saddle that's in the wrong place and the screw is slightly bevelled at the back. The top-E saddle has not worn like the rest, which suggests this was a replacement. The measurement from threaded post to post is 75mm. It's worth noting here that this is the condition it was in when Mike Gooch purchased it – Kossoff in all probability could have used it like this.

The slotted screw head is thinner, suggesting it came off a non-original '59 ABR-1. If you broke a string, these were easily lost. The bridge is now almost completely without gold plating, and the little that remains can just be seen between the saddles and the lower part of the bridge. The fit on both threaded posts is tight, and underneath the thumbwheels there is another set screwed down to the top of the guitar – again, this can be seen in some of the archive pictures. The spare tune-o-matic bridge in the case with its retaining wire and nylon saddles dates from after 1962, and is in fine condition. >



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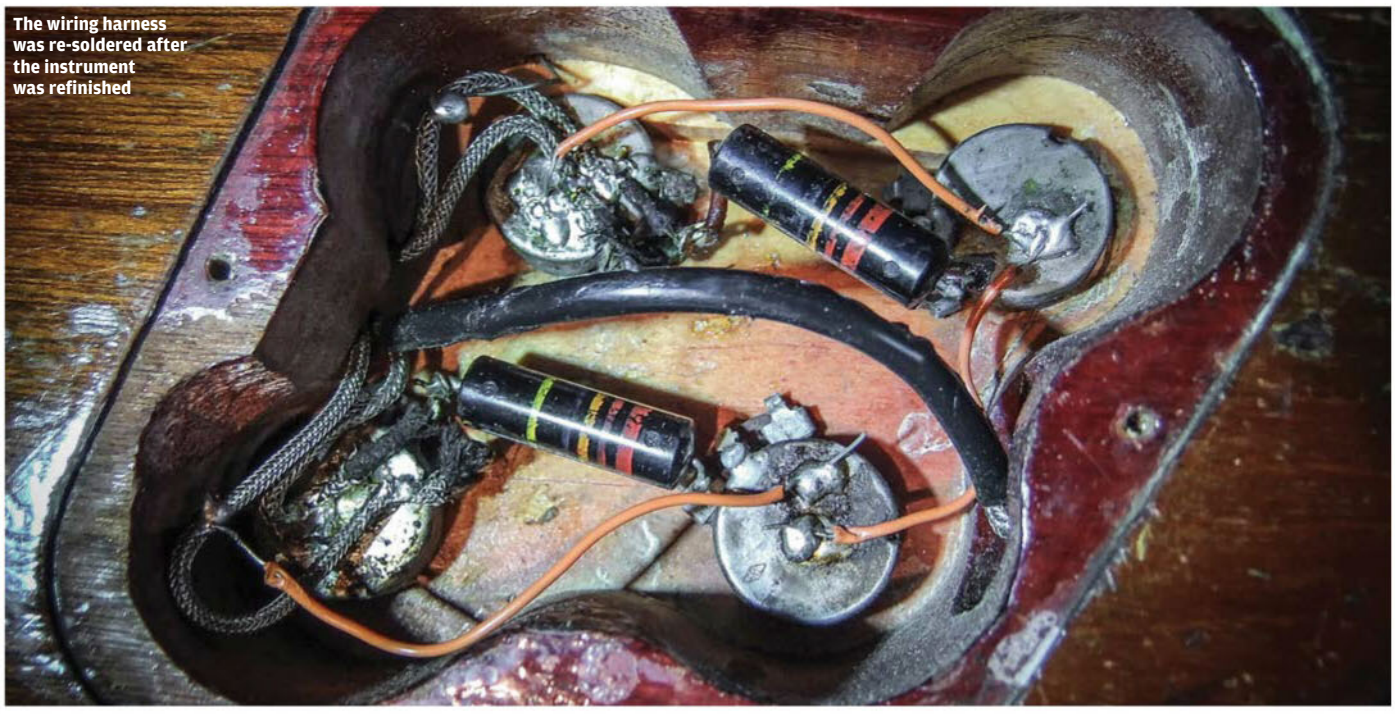
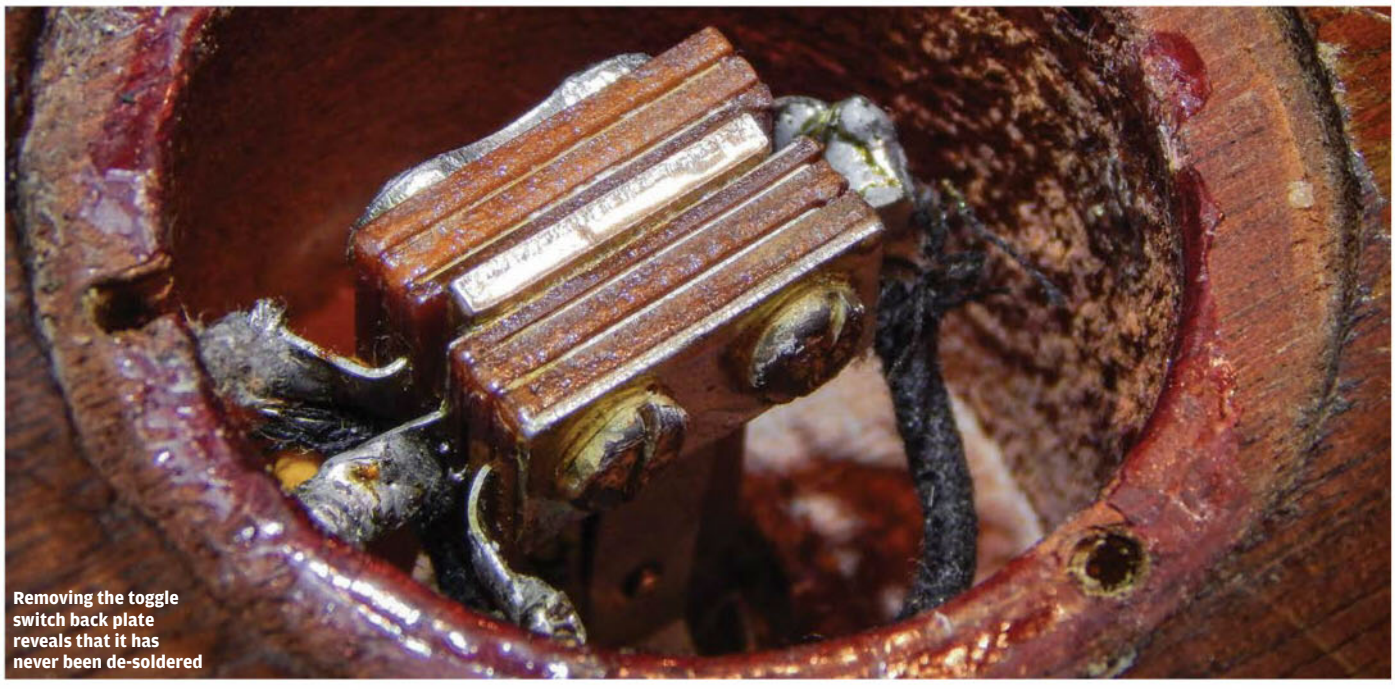


The wiring harness was re-soldered after the instrument was refinished



Removing the toggle switch back plate reveals that it has never been de-soldered

It has been said that Kossoff liked the mellowness of the nylon saddles.

Tailpiece

The stop tailpiece is made from aluminium, and the gold plating has almost disappeared; it measures 101.72mm. It's anchored down by two worn steel studs, which are a very tight fit, and we'd expect them to have a positive effect on tone. The tailpiece is raised only slightly off the body, and the strings just clear the bridge at the top back edge.

Control knobs

Incredibly, these are the original bonnet style. Just as we spot that the rhythm volume knob has been replaced, the owner produces the original! Apparently, it keeps falling off, but it's in fine condition with a lovely green tinge appearing around the bottom of the numbers. The control pointers are still in place, which is nice to see. The knobs measure 18.72mm across the mid-section and 26.27mm across the lower skirt.

Toggle switch and poker chip

The toggle surround, or 'poker chip', is also original and has faded, but on close inspection you can still see the lettering. In 1959, the typeface started to become more refined: the letter 'R' is slightly wider than in 1958. 1959 also saw the plastic start to get thinner, as seen here. The diameter is 33.34mm. The toggle switch tip has been replaced but, once again, the original is in the case. The switch works perfectly. Removing the toggle switch back plate reveals that it has not been de-soldered, which gives us a clue as to how the refinish could have been carried out.

PAFs and plastics

The neck pickup's gold-plated cover is now very worn, and the glimpse of a white bobbin can be seen around the low-E string's pole-piece screw. The owner tells us it's a double-white PAF.

The pickup has a DC resistance of 8.38k ohms. The bridge pickup is similarly worn, with a black bobbin on the screw-coil side. We're informed that it could be either a

The guitar's four original Centralab pots date from September 1958

double-black or zebra PAF. The DC resistance is 7.99k ohms.

During 1959, double white or zebra combinations were a common look, with double-black bobbins reinstated by mid-1960. The oft-repeated story is that the company supplying the bobbins ran out of black pigment in early 1959, but Gibson didn't mind as the pickup covers would hide them. On zebra PAFs, the white bobbin is nearly always on the non-adjustable slug side, with just a few exceptions. We can't help but wonder if this was done for cosmetic reasons – a Les Paul Standard or Custom with a glint of white showing around the pole-pieces would not look as good as it would if the black coil was on the adjustment side. Were exceptions to this rule absent-minded mistakes on a repetitious production line?

The M69 pickup rings look great on this guitar. The neck surround shows excessive wear near the G, B and E strings, which is the area where Kossoff would play his solos. The plastic is rather thin, so we resist the urge to remove it and run the risk of cracks appearing – we know what lies beneath. It's advisable to avoid taking the screws out of a vintage surround anyway, unless you know that the guitar has been out of its case for a couple of hours. This allows the cold plastic time to adjust to room temperature – and original plastics are expensive! The original jack socket plate has been replaced by a large, oversized one with slotted screws – it appears to be handmade, and around the jack socket nut there are fine cracks.

Maple top

When was this guitar stripped of its finish, and why? The truth is we'll probably never know for certain, but it was a common sight to see stripped finishes in the late sixties – The Beatles were among those artists convinced that it made their instruments sound better.

The natural flame maple cap on this guitar is really striking and is a quarter-sawn/flat-sawn pattern. When you walk around the guitar, it pulses almost like blinds opening and closing – this top is hypnotic. >

Behind the bridge and tailpiece, holes have been filled where a Bigsby B7 was fitted.

Headstock

Taking a measurement on the low-E side shows a thickness of 16.26mm tapering towards the top to 14.55mm. This is typical of headstock design on many Gibson guitars up until the early 1960s. The black lacquer is original to when Kossoff owned the guitar: there are a number of cracks and plenty of general wear and tear, and around the edge of the headstock the holly veneer is showing through.

Between the A-string tuner and B-string tuner there is a small chip of missing lacquer, which is visible in photos and film from around the time of the *Beat-Club* shows. Around 1974, the original Kluson tuners were replaced with Grover Rotomatics. The Grovers are smooth, but in the past the string posts seem to have had larger washers fitted, as there are visible impressions in the lacquer. Looking at the back of the headstock, there are offset screw holes which indicate that between the Klusons and the Grovers there was another set, hence the lacquer impressions.

The nut width measures 42.56mm and is a bone replacement. It is polished and the strings are spaced very well, but the slots are a little too deep, especially on the B and E strings, and a little too wide. The original nylon nut is also in the case. We're given permission to perform a truss-rod adjustment, as there is too much neck relief.

A combination of circumstance and instinct lead us to believe that this really was the guitar used to record the studio version of *All Right Now*

Neck and 'board

The Brazilian rosewood fingerboard is in very good condition with no serious inlay shrinkage. On the second fret, between the D and E strings, there is just a little wear on the rosewood – it's remarkable that there isn't more wear here, but that may have been down to Kossoff's fast vibrato. That said, it's not surprising that the guitar needed a refret when Mike Gooch bought it. The frets were changed again in 2009, and the job was very well done with nicely rounded fret ends.

The binding is original. When the fret ends were dressed and polished, some lacquer would naturally be lost, so the binding was masked off from the neck in the process and had some touch-up lacquer applied, which was very well done.

Before Kossoff owned this guitar, it was a sunburst – there are still signs of red lacquer in the control cavity and the toggle switch area. The lacquer on the back of the neck and body is very road-worn, as you would expect. The heel is quite large, but there is nothing unusual about that, as you can find variations throughout 1959. The depth at the first fret is just over 20mm, filling out to 22.25mm at the 12th fret. Although this is a slimmer neck than your average '59, it's not unusual and the move towards the thinner profiles associated with 1960 Bursts was a transition rather than an abrupt step change. Was the neck shaved as has been suggested? There's no physical evidence to support that theory.

Back and sides

It's common for the backs of late-50s Les Pauls to vary in colour from deep cherry to dark brown like this one. Mahogany has an even greater tendency than maple to oxidise and change colour over time, and exposure to UV rays breaks down the pigmentation. When the original sunburst finish on this guitar was stripped, the back of the guitar may have had an overspray whilst the work was done to give cosmetic uniformity, which would lead to a loss of the serial number after a light sanding, prior to spraying. There's no evidence of a complete refinish.

The strap buttons are consistent with those in the Isle Of Wight film footage, and you can also see unfilled holes from the Bigsby hinge plate. The neck joint area has lost almost all of its lacquer and you can see the dark brown grain and neck joint showing through.

Under the plate

The owner preferred that the controls remained untouched, so photographing the pot codes proved difficult, but after some image manipulation we managed to discern a '134839' stamp – four original Centralab pots from September 1958. As we've discussed before in these pages, it's common to see potentiometers with 1958 date stamps in '59 Les Pauls, as Gibson tended to bulk-buy components ahead of production.

The pots were obviously taken out for the spraying work, but it seems that the toggle switch wiring was simply pulled through the guitar after de-soldering on the volume pots: there was no need to take the wire off the switch. When everything was reassembled, the plain ground wire was replaced with orange insulating wire. The ground wire from inside the body was soldered back on. We're not sure why one of the orange wires is soldered to the braided wire when it should be on the back of the can, but it works just the same. The soldering won't win any prizes in a beauty contest, but everything is secure nonetheless.

Legendary sounds

Plugging this guitar into a Marshall was a must. On a clean setting, using the bridge pickup, every string is clear with loads of harmonics coming to the forefront as the chord dies away. The balance is superb, with the bass strings never fighting to be >

The gold plating has almost worn off the tailpiece

The playing wear in the cutaway and around the neck join is extensive

This guitar has seen plenty of playing time since the gold parts were fitted

Plugging the guitar into an amp was a thrilling experience

dominant. Every chord up the neck produces a lively acoustic quality. The middle position gives good balance between both pickups; it's a really nice midrange sound with great depth, perfect for arpeggios or big chords and reminiscent of a big Gibson ES-350T. The rhythm pickup rewards you with thick warm overtones and none of that bass boom taking over the show (think Free's *Oh I Wept* and you've got it).

The tone controls have a lovely smooth roll-off rather than shut-off, typical of the Sprague Bumble Bee capacitors. Moving over to crunch, we're reluctant to even attempt any Kossoff licks on this guitar, but talking with the owner about the way Kossoff played the opening A chord for *All Right Now*, we go for it! As soon as we hit that chord, it's clear that the character and balance from the bridge pickup nails it.

For comparison, we A/B with a Les Paul Deluxe from 1970-71, which was originally a Goldtop but had humbuckers fitted around the time of purchase and was also stripped of its finish. The Deluxe's pickups are T-Tops, the construction is similar and it also has Sprague caps fitted. The sound difference is remarkable, and in comparison the Deluxe's bridge pickup sounds harsh and brittle and lacks colour.

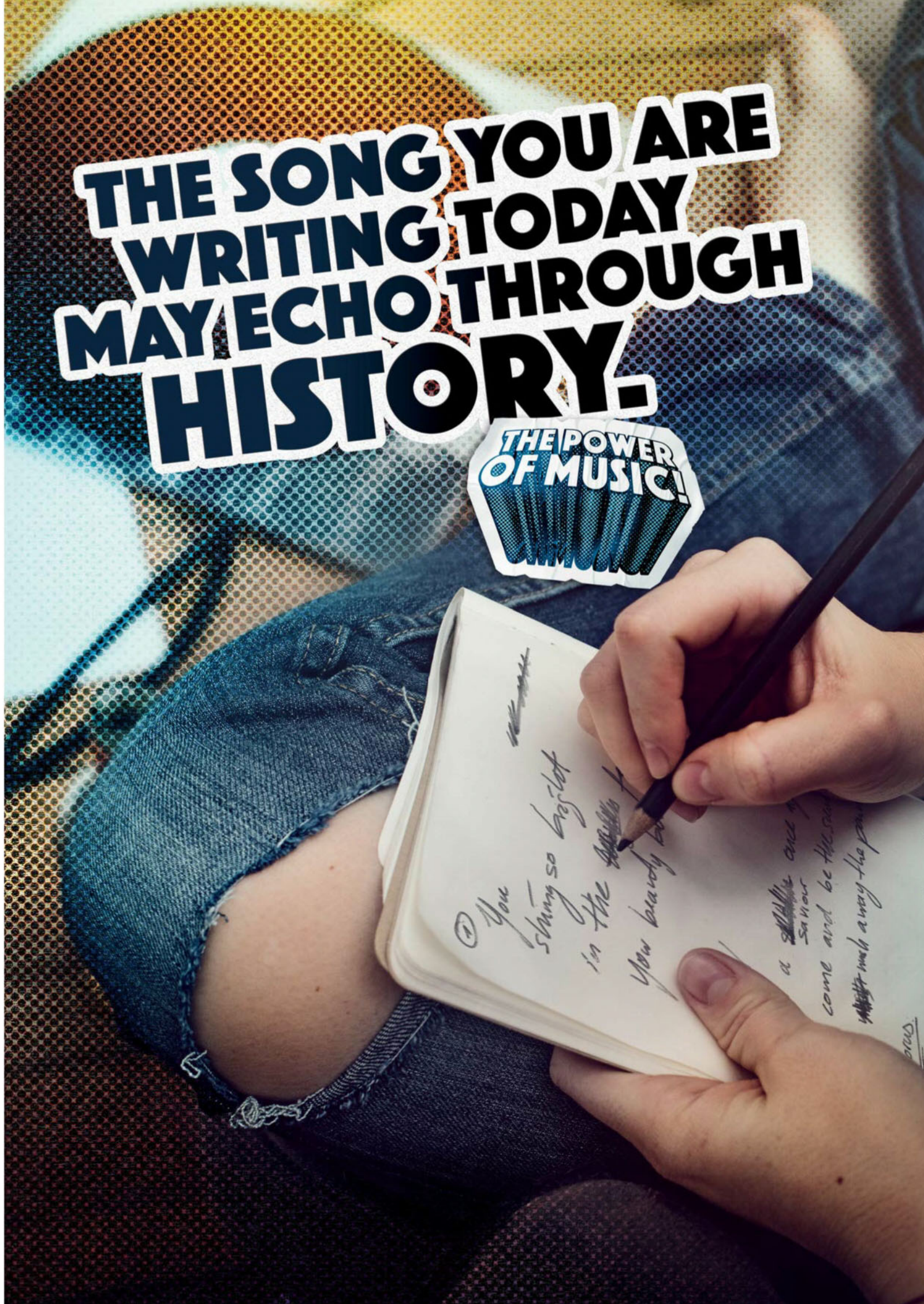
Comparing the rhythm pickup, we both cringe at the volume increase and overwhelming bottom end that lacks the finesse the Kossoff guitar has in abundance. The sustain from the Kossoff guitar is awesome, and it's no doubt helped by the stripped finish and great coupling in the bridge and tailpiece area.

It's been a pleasure to look at this iconic instrument in detail and to discover that it hasn't lost much of its original hardware or been resprayed and sold on, unrecognisable forever. All of the details lead us to conclude that this Les Paul Standard was manufactured in 1959, and a combination of circumstance and instinct lead us to believe that this really was the guitar used to record the studio version of *All Right Now*. After years in the wilderness, it's Free At Last!

G&B would like to thank David Clayton of the Free Appreciation Society, Paul Kossoff biographer JP James, and the owner of this beautiful guitar for their help with this feature. Contact Steve Clarke via FamousFrets.com

VITAL STATISTICS

- **WEIGHT** 8.74lbs/3.96kg
- **HEADSTOCK** Low-E side depth 16.26mm, top 14.55mm, headstock width at top edge 78.54mm
- **NECK** Depth at first fret 20mm, 12th fret 22.25mm, 16th fret width 54.68mm
- **MACHINEHEADS** Grover Rotomatic
- **NUT** 42.56mm
- **FRETS** 2.61mm
- **BODY** Thickness 49.41mm at toggle area and 47.09mm behind tailpiece
- **PICKUPS** Bridge 7.99k ohms, neck 8.38k ohms
- **BRIDGE** ABR-1 tune-o-matic, length 83.9mm and width 10.76mm, post to post 75mm
- **CONTROL KNOBS** Gold 'bonnet' type, 8.72mm at waist, 26.27mm at numbered edge
- **TAILPIECE** 101.72mm length
- **TOGGLE SURROUND** 33.34mm
- **PICKUP SURROUND** 45.20mm width, 89.31mm length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Eric Clapton backstage at the *Music In The Fifth Dimension* show at the RKO Theatre in New York on 31 March, 1967

THE Guitar & Bass FEATURE

Clapton At The Crossroads

Still revered as one of the most pioneering bands of all time, Cream are credited with inventing everything from the supergroup to jam rock, to heavy metal and breakthrough guitar tones. But even 'God' can reach too high, with Eric Clapton later admitting: "I was suffering from delusions of grandeur". New, expanded boxset releases nevertheless reveal a group of staggering ability...

Story **Michael Stephens** Photography **Getty Images**

Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. Chickenfoot. Velvet Revolver. Supergroups don't always have the greatest names – a joke or afterthought often seems to do. But the original, Cream, at least thought about it. They were christened "the cream", as in "cream of the crop". Kickstarting an era when instrumental prowess – over and above songcraft, image or even innovation – was king, Cream had lofty ambitions, too. Yet, just like the real thing, they soured all too quickly.

For the band's biggest star, Eric Clapton, Cream remain a milestone and a millstone. It 'made' him, but also broke him. He hoped it was going to be "experimental and funny and rebellious", but it ended up "a failed experiment", a benchmark for battling egos, confused aims and wayward self-importance. Such things happen, it seems, even to Gods.

"We got into a lot of self-indulgence and a lot of easily pleased people went along with that," Clapton later reflected. "It flattered our vanity, and after that I think we stopped trying." Even so, Cream remain fascinating...

All three members knew each other well and wanted to play together again, yes. But on more than one occasion Jack Bruce stated he and Ginger Baker, when they weren't fighting, saw Cream very much as a vehicle for progressing their own jazz/improv backgrounds. Eric Clapton had quit The Yardbirds for John Mayall because the 'birds weren't bluesy enough, but after Mayall? Clapton wanted Cream to emulate the trio of his hero Buddy Guy.

"It seemed to me you could do anything with a trio," Clapton said of Cream's conception, "at least if you were a genius and a maestro like Buddy Guy. I was suffering from delusions of grandeur in that direction." And, for his part, manager Robert Stigwood was much closer to Clapton than he was to Bruce or Baker (Stigwood would continue to manage EC post-Cream). Yet if Stigwood saw Cream as a way of elevating 'God' even higher – to the position of frontman, fashion leader and pop star – he had something of a challenge on his hands.

"Maybe I had something of the technical ability, or was at least heading in the right direction," Clapton later judged. "But I didn't have the confidence, or anything like it. I was seeing Buddy Guy and thinking, 'I can do that'. But, in fact, I'd never really sung in my life. I'd seen myself as the front guy with Cream. But when we got there, the reality was that Jack was easily the best equipped for that role. And that's how it immediately evolved."

In the late Jack Bruce's words, "When we first got together, we had a competition to see who wouldn't be the singer. I didn't want to be singer, Eric didn't want to either. I guess I lost."

Fresh sounds

Full of three already arguing headstrong characters, Cream's music was no one-man recipe. Moreover, *Fresh Cream* was no studiously planned project like *Pet Sounds* or *Revolver*. It was cut on-the-fly. The newly released Deluxe Reissue of *Fresh Cream* – four CDs plus a hi-res Blu-ray disc – captures the genesis of Cream in unrivalled detail. It has been executive produced by Bill Levenson, renowned archivist and compiler of the *Clapton Crossroads* and *Layla* boxsets, and numerous previous Cream reissues.

"The sessions start early August 1966, and go to December 1966," Levenson explains to *G&B*. "Cream had only been together for a month or two. And the sessions were ad hoc. The first were in Rayrick Studios in London, later renamed Chalk Farm Studio. The band were playing a lot of shows around London, so it was just in and out, whenever they could. Then they moved onto Ryemuse (aka Spot Studios) in Mayfair. It was all four-track, they were a new band, no-one saw where this was >

CREAMY TONES

From Les Pauls to SGs to Firebirds... Cream saw Clapton embrace the lore of loud, then change sounds altogether. Post-Cream, he would never sound the same again...

Although Clapton's guitar auctions always command premium prices, it's his Cream guitars that fascinate most. Clapton's "Beano" album Les Paul Standard sunburst was famously stolen around Cream's first rehearsals, but EC remained faithful to 'bucker-loaded Gibsons throughout Cream's existence. There were quite a few. For Cream's live debut at 66's National Jazz & Blues Festival (31 July), Clapton played a Bigsby-loaded Burst. This might be the Stones' famous 'Keithburst', borrowed.

Two other Les Pauls were around. One was a redder sunburst, apparently bought from the same shop where Andy Summers (Zoot Money, then The Police) bought his... but that was also stolen. So EC then badgered Summers for his own Les Paul. Summers later recounted, "I didn't really want to sell it. And, of course, none of us had any idea what the value [would be today]; it was probably a '59, worth about a million dollars.

"I sold it to him for £200, I remember. He kept calling me, and I finally gave in. I think he recorded most of *Fresh Cream* with that Les Paul." Another LP, known as the 'darkburst,' went to Paul Kossoff, Clapton trading it for a Black Beauty of Koss's that Clapton played in latter-day Cream. Some have suggested that Bernie Marsden's famous LP 'The Beast' might be the 'Beano' Les Paul stolen from Clapton in 1966. See our Beauty Of The Beast feature online at guitar-bass.net for more intrigue and speculation.

Clapton acquired his Gibson SG for Cream's US debut in 1967, famously finished with a psychedelic paintjob by the Dutch artists The Fool. Clapton told *Beat Instrumental* in '67, "I am playing more smoothly now. I'm developing what I call my 'woman' tone. It's a sweet sound, something like the solo on *I Feel Free*. It is more like the human voice than the guitar. You wouldn't think it was a guitar for the first few passages. It calls for the correct use of distortion."

In the 90s, Clapton revealed, "I think that SG went through the Cream thing just about the longest, it was really a very, very powerful and comfortable instrument because of its lightness and the width and the flatness of the neck... it had everything I wanted at that point."

The Fool SG's finish was ultimately hopeless, though: Simon Posthuma and Marijke Koger were artists, not guitar finishers. As paint flaked off the neck and body, Clapton switched to Gibson ES-335s and a single-pickup Gibson Firebird I. One day, he reportedly left the Fool SG with George Harrison, and never returned for it. It went through various owners thereafter... most notably Todd Rundgren, who witnessed Clapton playing it at Cream's US live debut in NYC in '67.

ES-335s have remained a Clapton favourite, and he used his Cream original for years. He eventually auctioned it in 2004 for $847,000, the biggest sum for any Gibson electric. Latter '68 saw him use the Firebird I more: he played it on Cream's final dates, and also during the *Super Session* show (Dec 1968) with hero Buddy Guy. The mini-humbucker on the Firebird was a lot edgier-sounding than PAFs or later Gibson 'buckers on an ES-335 Les Paul or SG. Tellingly, Clapton's reedier tone in late Cream eventually led him to bona fide single coils with his adoption of Fender Strats.

As for amps, he moved from the Marshall Series II 1962 combo of the Bluesbreakers days to the two new Marshall JTM100 amps and matching 4×12 cabs. Cream played punishingly loud, with EC's default being "full-on everything... full treble, full bass and full presence, same with the controls on the guitar". Tom Dowd remembers of recording Clapton and Bruce on *Disraeli Gears*: "Three or four Marshalls, wide open, feedback, earth-shattering levels... I couldn't hear Ginger when I walked into the studio, and Ginger Baker is a loud drummer. He couldn't even hear himself!"

"I actually went deaf for a period of time," Clapton recalled. "When we were playing at the Fillmore for a while, I was wearing specially designed ear plugs. I was playing full-volume in a kind of weird, traumatic state - knowing that I had to play, and not really wanting to. I was deaf, I was wearing these ear plugs, and I couldn't hear through them. I was really brought down."

going... There were no 'album sessions' as such. *Fresh Cream* is an indie record in a lot of ways."

It's now renowned as a landmark album, but even a cursory listen evinces a band pulling all over the place. Levenson notes: "There's obviously the blues element – *Spoonful, Cat's Squirrel, Rollin' And Tumblin', I'm So Glad* – but there's this other side that Ginger had been doing with Graham Bond. *Toad* isn't really even a song. It's not psychedelic, it's not blues, it's just a drum showcase. Then there's the Pete Brown (co-written) songs with Jack Bruce. They're charming, but looking back, they're peculiar. *Coffee Song, Wrapping Paper, NSU*... It's true, The Yardbirds were also mixing pure pop songs and blues songs, but it's more odd that Cream started with *Wrapping Paper*. I can't think of a weaker song to debut with!"

On the BBC Radio interview included on the *Fresh Cream* reissue, Clapton explains that he wanted Cream to "surprise people: not just be accepted as a blues band [but] more than that." A surprise, *Wrapping Paper* certainly was. The hazy Bruce/Brown jazz number bombed and Clapton himself actually hated it. Then again, Clapton had no songs of his own to offer. Ginger Baker later judged *Wrapping Paper*, "the most appalling piece of shit I've heard in my life".

"It's telling that *I Feel Free* was the second single," notes Levenson. "That's more blues-ish, but it's also a real powerful song."

I Feel Free, although another Bruce/Brown composition, certainly has endured. It ushers in the first example of EC's so-called 'woman' tone (here, played on a borrowed Les Paul rather than an SG). The new Deluxe Reissue of *Fresh Cream* features a vocal-less mix of *I Feel Free*, which highlights just how tight a trio Cream were. Yet throughout *Fresh Cream*, Clapton is not credited with writing anything. Bruce's lyric in *NSU* – "The only time I'm happy's when I play my guitar" – seems to suit the guitarist's mindset. In an early *Rolling Stone* interview, Clapton opined, "That's where I want to be at: where I just don't ever have to play anything but improvisation."

What was that he said about flattering his own vanity?

Jimi vs God on the Killing Floor

Clapton's 'God' reputation remained intact as Cream played incessantly and finished cutting *Fresh Cream* tracks. On 1 October 1966, they accepted a request that a young Jimi Hendrix – in the UK only weeks – come and jam at a Regent Street Polytechnic show. It turned out to be not much of a licks-trading session, though. Jimi came on and absolutely killed *Killing Floor*, while Clapton, who had yet to even master the song, stood in awe with his hands at his side. According to folklore, EC walked off, furiously telling Jimi's manager Chas Chandler backstage: "You never told me he was that fucking good". It was no case of oneupmanship, though: when Chas Chandler had invited Jimi to London, Jimi had not asked about money or contracts – Hendrix merely asked if Chas would introduce him to Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton.

Intentional or otherwise, "[Jimi] definitely pulled the rug out from under Cream," Clapton later admitted. "I told people like Pete Townshend about him, and we'd go and see him."

Clapton and Jimi became friends and, yes, Eric suddenly had an afro. Townshend remembered, after he and EC compared notes: "What Eric did was... peculiar. He said, 'Well, I'm going to pretend that I am Jimi Hendrix!'"

After Jack Bruce experienced a full Jimi show, Clapton remembered: "After the gig, Jack went home and came up with the riff >

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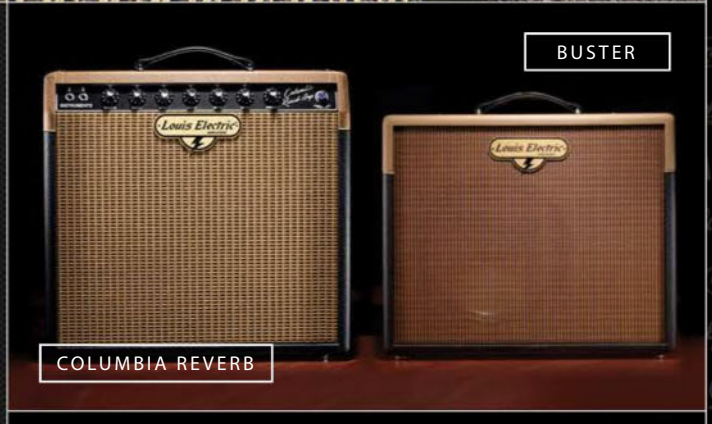

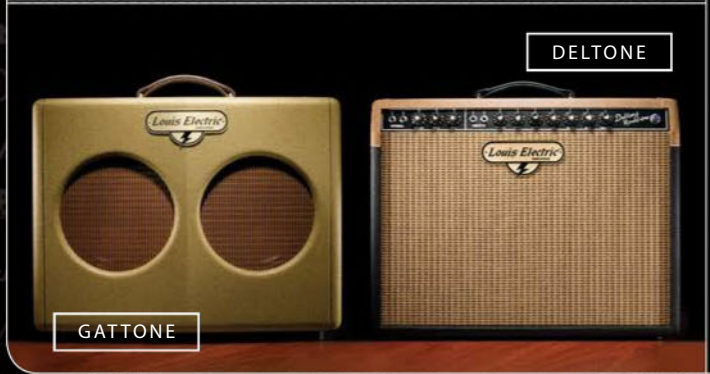

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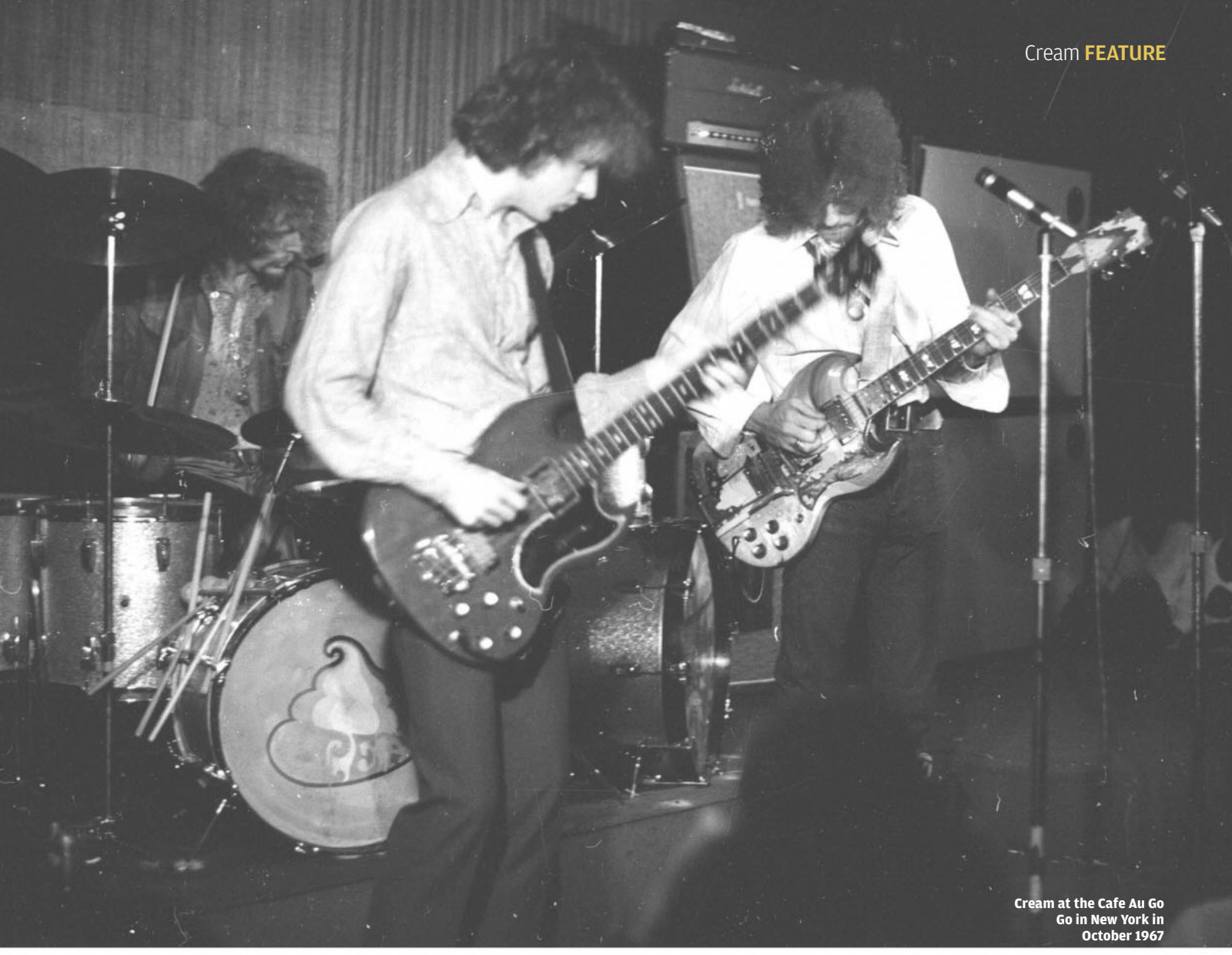

Cream at the Cafe Au Go Go in New York in October 1967

[*Sunshine Of Your Love*]. It was strictly a dedication to Jimi. And then we wrote a song on top of it." When Cream toured the US in early 1967, Clapton went to Manny's guitar store in Manhattan and bought his first wah: "They said Jimi had one, and so that was enough for me. I had to have one too."

Bill Levenson reckons: "You can hear the influence right away in Cream's February 1967 demos. There was definitely sounds of Hendrix in there, sounds of Townshend, the Jeff Beck Group too. They were all trading off each other."

Changing Gears

Follow-up album *Disraeli Gears*, recorded in NYC in spring '67 and released in November, was a massive leap forward. More focused than *Fresh Cream*, it saw Clapton bring more than supercharged blues licks to the table. He co-wrote three songs, at least, and the role of occasional lead or co-vocalist sat easier. And yet...

Although it would be wrong to write history as a Jimi vs Eric battle, Hendrix's *Axis: Bold As Love* was a far more inventive slice of psych-rock production. Hendrix was proving himself quickly a master of the studio. Cream were, primarily, still a live band. "They did have a more concentrated session for *Disraeli Gears*," says Bill Levenson, "but it wasn't longer than seven or 10 days."

Disraeli Gears engineer (and future *Layla* producer) Tom Dowd said time wasn't even that generous, with Cream's US Visa window proving limiting. "The equipment arrived on a Thursday, they walked in on a Friday, played the numbers they had been playing on tour, and on Sunday the limousines came right to the studio and took them to the airport. That was it." By contrast, Jimi's *Axis...* was recorded over sessions in May, June and October of the same year.

> "They walked in on Friday, and on Sunday the limousines came to the studio and took them to the airport"
>
> DISRAELI GEARS ENGINEER TOM DOWD

Dowd's task was further complicated by recording practicalities. Cream had been touring with their 220V Marshall stacks, but the concert venues at least had US voltage step-down transformers to make the backline run properly. "This was at Atlantic Records in New York, 11 West 60th Street. Being that it was a weekend, we had limited access to transformers and things that could correct some of the problems... They were playing under hardship, and I was recording under hardship because none of the equipment was really running the way it was designed to run. That's the truth. We were absolutely abusing some of the electronics, and as a result, it altered the sounds considerably."

Yet amid all of this mayhem, *Disraeli Gears* stands as Cream's most rounded album. Their double third LP, *Wheels Of Fire*, was half-live and only seemed to compound the band's schizophrenic nature. "When they come back in early '68, they have a handful of leftovers, some new tracks," notes Levenson, "they record those in April '68 and that becomes a very good record in *Wheels Of Fire*. But if you look at the sessions that was drawn from, it's probably eight or nine months of recording." On its release, Cream announced they were splitting anyway. And the posthumous *Goodbye* was a brief mop-up... Cream simply didn't leave enough decent recordings.

Cream's crash and burn

Recording at pace and not out-staying their welcome was both Cream's triumph and >

their Achilles heel. "That's why the sound of Cream varies so much," says Bill Levenson. "There's no resemblance, in terms of sonic template, in what they were doing in late-66 to mid-68. It's two lifetimes as we know it now."

Ultimately, Cream took Eric Clapton to his own musical crossroads. He was still, in his heart, in thrall to the blues. Yet by the time EC started writing songs for Cream, notably *Badge* and *Anyone For Tennis*, they weren't 'the blues' at all, and those songs would have sat quite comfortably on future Blind Faith or Clapton solo albums. And the problem was, his championing of the blues wasn't quite as hip as before. A devastating live review in *Rolling Stone* killed off an already-ailing Cream. On stage was where Cream were out-staying their welcome...

"Clapton is a master of the blues clichés of all the post-World War II blues guitarists, particularly BB King and Albert King," wrote Jon Landau in his *Rolling Stone* review of Cream's 1968 show at Brandeis University, Boston. "And he didn't play a note that wasn't blues during the course of the concert... Improvisation means the creation of new musical ideas spontaneously. It does not mean stringing together pieces and phrases of already learned musical ideas." Harsh: though to Landau's credit, he was the critic who later wrote, "I saw rock and roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen". Landau went on to become Springsteen's manager.

Clapton – at the time only 23 – later admitted Landau's criticism "was true", but the review "just about knocked me cold. At that point, I decided to leave Cream". Destroying a band over a press review was drastic, but Ginger Baker later explained that *Rolling Stone* was Clapton's bible: "From the day he saw that review, he wanted to be in the background. He didn't want to be the focus of attention anymore."

Cream in New York in 1968, two years after the release of *Fresh Cream*

Cream's legacy

It's probably fair to say that the Cream years remain, even half a century on, the most fascinating era in Eric Clapton's career. His 'God' rep in select circles was earned with Mayall's Bluesbreakers, but his Cream cuts pretty much launched the notion of an Atlantic-straddling guitar hero. His blues soloing on the likes of *Crossroads* and *Spoonful* (particularly the live *Wheels Of Fire* versions) remain licks of legend. His more progressive playing, albeit highly influenced by Hendrix, on the likes of *Tales Of Brave Ulysses*, *White Room*, *Sitting On Top Of The World* and *Deserted Cities Of The Heart* saw his palette expand. The tones? Everyone from Tony Iommi to Eddie Van Halen to Joe Bonamassa has cited Cream-era EC as a prime touchstone. The bands? Well, Rory Gallagher's Taste, Black Sabbath, Free, Led Zeppelin, Gov't Mule, Mountain, Ten Years After and more owe a huge debt. Cream – not so much a name as a thrown-down gauntlet – made a massive impact.

Many still believe that Cream were, indeed, the pinnacle of Clapton's recorded work. Jack Bruce still believed so in 1997. "I think that, musically, Cream was his high spot so far," Bruce told *Forbes*. "He was so good! He would be playing this shit that really took you to another place."

> "This is the record, for me, that opened me up to all the other British blues bands. Everybody"
>
> BILL LEVENSON

Clapton himself was never as vocally enthusiastic. He has since called Cream a "failed experiment", and also "a glorious mistake. It ended up being a wonderful thing, but nothing like it was meant to be."

From the perspective of someone who studies Clapton's back catalogue closer than EC probably does himself, Bill Levenson offers, "I would never attempt to speak for Eric, but I think the relationship of the players probably colours his opinion of what they left behind. I would never say that it was a 'failed experiment'."

Having just completed the uber-expansive *Fresh Cream* reissue, Levenson adds, "I can only speak personally. When *Fresh Cream* came out, I was 12 years old... and I missed it. But I did get *Disraeli Gears*, so went back to *Fresh Cream* immediately. So I've known the album for 50 years, it's just in my DNA. I sometimes find it hard to place in context, 'cos what I hear is just a great record.

"This is the record, for me, that opened me up to all the other British blues bands. Everybody. Before the Mayall record, though I sure got that soon after. *Fresh Cream* set the template for me. It may not be fantastically recorded, but it's just so well executed. It's become as familiar and comfortable as any other landmark, be it *Revolver* or *Rubber Soul*, or *Are You Experienced*.

"Influence is a funny thing when everything is moving so fast. It was a week-by-week event. *Fresh Cream* pre-dates *Are You Experienced*. Then *Are You Experienced* just pre-dates *Disraeli Gears*... one after another. It was an incredible time. It's hard to pinpoint the big bang, y'know? But... it starts with *Fresh Cream* as well as it does with anything."

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HEART & SOUL

He's worked alongside musical legends such as Otis Redding and Booker T, was the house guitarist for Stax Records and played on a catalogue of hit records. *G&B* meets Steve Cropper

Story **Teri Saccone**

Steve Cropper has enjoyed a career as an almost impossibly accomplished musical polymath since the early 60s. A songwriter, producer, A&R man and guitarist, Cropper is often cited among the most influential guitarists ever and is an acommplished soul player. An in-the-pocket rhythm man, he attracts devotion from fellow guitarists for his masterful slinky groove-based playing. His vibrant songwriting legacy, including *Green Onions*, *(Sittin' On) The Dock Of the Bay*, *Knock On Wood* and *In The Midnight Hour*, helped define the 60s soul era. 'The Crop' co-founded instrumental trailblazers Booker T & The MGs and has collaborated with Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Wilson Pickett, Eddie Floyd, Aretha Franklin and many others.

Born in Missouri, Cropper's family moved to Memphis when he was nine. He was already besotted with the guitar. Back then, youngsters learnt to play by listening to records; Cropper was a fast learner, and by the time he reached high school had established The Mar-Keys. The rest is history.

"It's just instinct," he explains when asked how he knew which acts to direct his efforts towards. "I was like a fisherman who just knew where to fish." He summarises his musical legacy almost nonchalantly: "It entices people to have a good time, maybe get up and dance." Cropper's primary inspiration? "The singers I played behind were my main focus and inspiration."

A 'feel' player, 'Crop' does not extol much in the way of technical advice. "My only real tip pertaining to guitar is songwriting: just follow the dots on the neck to help you write a song. It doesn't get simpler than that. Some of the biggest songs ever written were done by that method, and I used it on *Soul Man*. Another thing I focus on is the intros: it's not just about creating music with a memorable melody, we made sure our songs had a loud intro, too – important back in the days when radio was king."

Among Cropper's guitar heroes were "Lowman Pauling of the "5" Royales, Billy Butler, Billy Doggett and Wayne Bennett, who played with Bobby "Blue" Bland. Those guys incited my licks and set me on my path."

Cropper played alongside his high school friend and bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn for decades, yet admits it was not Dunn that he formed the strongest musical partnership with, but instead the MGs' keyboardist: "It was Booker. He is a musical genius. What the band did was to bring it down to basics and make it feel simple, even if it wasn't. The line in *Green Onions* was in a ton of blues songs because you can't copyright a blues line. Yet people still find that tune captivating today."

> "Booker was a musical genius. What the band did was to bring it down to basics and make it feel simple, even if it wasn't"

Cropper's working relationship with Redding was fruitful and fun. "His enthusiasm, energy level and input made us play stuff we never thought of playing, and he influenced all these artists and made it so enjoyable." Redding died tragically at the age of 26, and Cropper's sense of loss remains palpable: "He was instantly the best soul singer we heard, me and Duck Dunn, the very day he opened his mouth to sing for us."

Cropper had little time to mourn, as he immediately returned to Stax to complete *(Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay* within a few days, adding his electric guitar to their composition. "I put my mind in another place and just did it. Then I kind of collapsed. Although we wrote together for years, I never knew we were the same age until his plane crashed. He'd fly in from Georgia and I'd >

meet him at the Holiday Inn, and we'd write sometimes all night long. He'd have tons of ideas and we'd go through them. His audiences were his best friends and he treated them that way."

It was while playing with Redding that Cropper pioneered his use of open-E tuning. "I think a lot of the licks I played behind Otis Redding in open-E tuning were fairly original," he says.

Michael Jackson said of songwriting that you "Gotta let God in the room", and Cropper concurs: "*I've Got Dreams To Remember* has a very emotional guitar part," he explains about another Redding/Cropper classic. "With songs like that, there's another force that comes into the room when you're writing, and this mysteriously comes through you. I had people in the business who couldn't believe I don't take drugs – they'd say, 'You're a songwriter and you don't smoke grass?'. I'd say, 'I don't like grass and it doesn't like me'.

"Every song that's credited Redding/Cropper is a song about him, despite him not writing about himself. He was who I always had in mind when we collaborated. *I Can't Turn You Loose* was heavily groove. He wouldn't always remember the lyrics on that live, but he made it work anyway."

Cropper writes not only intros and riffs, but also lyrics and bridges, and has arranged hundreds of songs. He co-wrote the classic *In The Midnight Hour*, remarkable for its gospel-tinged R&B and opening riff. "I came up with an intro for Wilson Pickett, and it's so identifiable that a few notes in people know exactly what song it is. Thing is, everything we did at Stax was really all about licks. We called them 'money licks'."

Cropper's collaboration with Eddie Floyd was similar to his alliance with Redding: "With Eddie, I wrote songs the same way as I did with Otis; we'd come together with ideas and then work out a song.

"With *Knock On Wood*, Eddie and I were discussing all the little good luck rituals, like throwing salt over your shoulder, and we came up with the song title that way. I was playing around with that, trying to come up with a suitable riff, so decided to play the *Midnight Hour* riff backwards, and came up with the riff for *Knock*... via that. And it turned out to be a neat little song."

When Stax fell apart in the 1970s, and soul gave way to funk and disco, Cropper relocated to LA for several years – where he worked with Elton John, Neil Young, Bob Dylan and Ringo Starr, among others before moving to Nashville, where he remains today.

Although he has played lead on dozens of tracks, Cropper prefers rhythm. "Lead is boring, but groove is not boring to me. I can play that groove for two hours and never miss a lick, and stay in the same tempo. A lot of guys play four bars of rhythm guitar and they're bored to death and have to play notes all over the place."

> "Lead is boring, but groove is not boring to me. I can play a groove for two hours, never miss a lick, and stay in the same tempo"

Cropper onstage with Otis Redding at Hunter College in New York in 1967

The Blues Brothers, the 1980 film starring John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd, was a blockbuster in which Cropper appeared and served as music director.

"During rehearsals, they asked for an up-tempo number, so I suggested Sam & Dave's *Soul Man* and John said, 'I love it but I can't sing it in that chord', so I dropped it down a fourth and I've played it that way ever since. "We had a hit movie, but that was the only song from the film that hit big. That was because the media gave them hell by insisting they were actors and not musicians. Wrong! Belushi played drums and sang in a rock band since age 16, and Ackroyd is a phenomenal harmonica player."

Now 75, Cropper has seen the passing of countless friends and colleagues. "It's a little weird," he says. "But when you live as long as me you lose a lot of friends and family, so you gotta keep moving. I think if the good man up there has kept me around this long, it must be for something. I was with Eddie Floyd last year in Monte Carlo. I told him, 'I guess you and me were always bad because only the good die young'."

As a producer, Cropper knew how to extract the best out of artists. "I don't have any tricks really," he admits. "Once they have confidence in their producer, it's easier to get the best performance out of them. If they don't like you they're not gonna say it, but them liking you makes it much easier. If you gain their trust, you can pull great music from them. Once I get the best performance then it's on to the next project."

After our interview, Cropper heads for the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, where he's endowing some of his landmark gear for posterity. The list includes a 1961 Fender Esquire 'Doc', which was played on *(Sittin' On) The Dock Of the Bay*, a '75 Telecaster used in *The Blues Brothers* and the album *Briefcase Full Of Blues*, as well as two Levon Helm albums; a 1951–52 Telecaster and the Fender Harvard amp he played on *Green Onions*. Cropper says it's something he feels "honoured to be a part of".

Cropper continues touring, and when off the road works in the historic RCA building in Nashville: "It was built for Elvis in 1964. We're in the room where he cut a lot of tracks."

We wonder what he makes of today's popular music: "It doesn't make people want to dance or do much of anything," he posits. "To me, much of it is a bit like the selfie: shallow and uninspiring."

Considering Steve Cropper made music history, he speaks as if much of his career was simply serendipitous and not gained through hard work and ingenuity. "I'm very lucky to have played with some of the greatest artists who ever walked the earth."

Steve onstage playing his signature Peavey Cropper Classic

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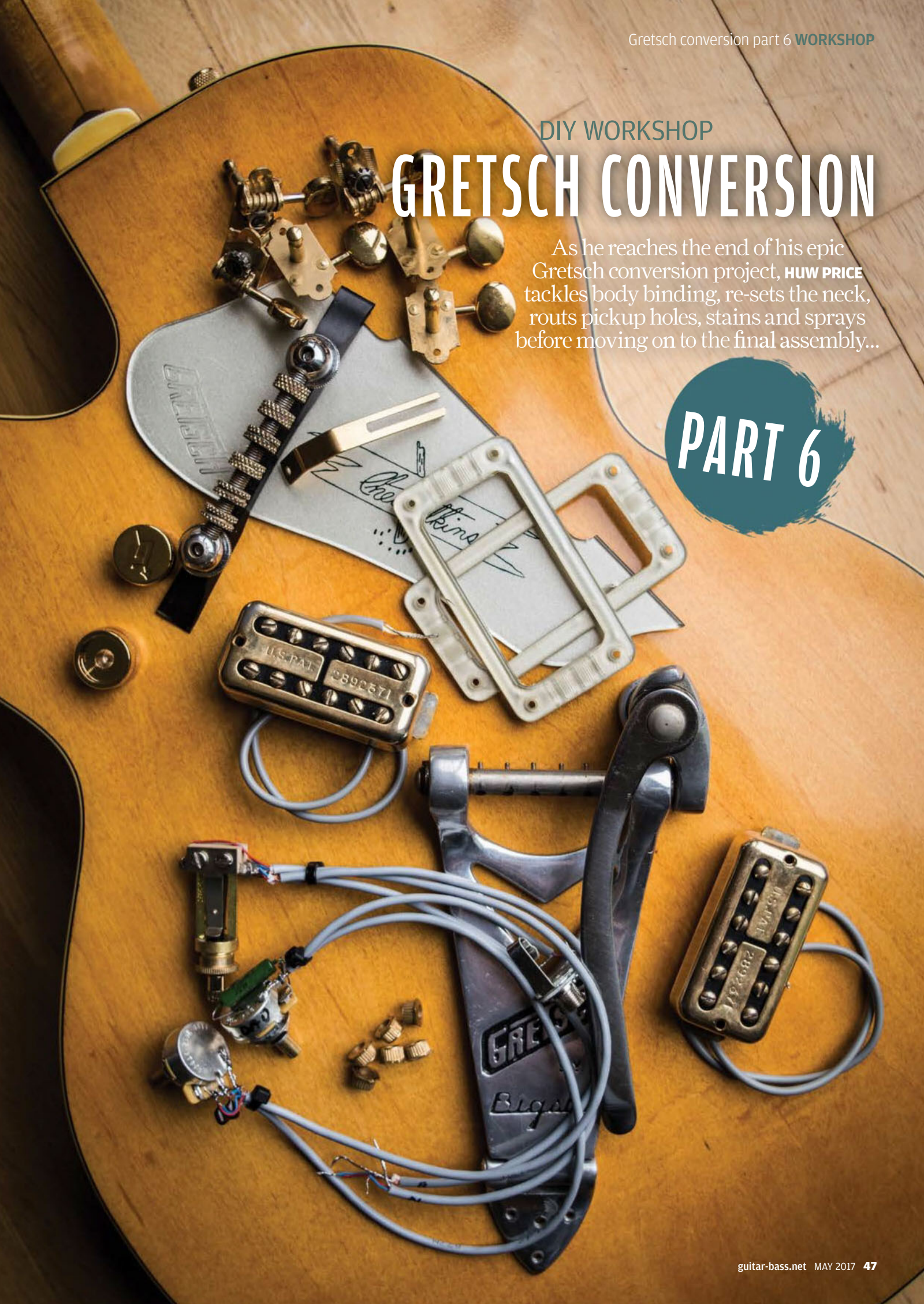
DIY WORKSHOP

GRETSCH CONVERSION

As he reaches the end of his epic Gretsch conversion project, **HUW PRICE** tackles body binding, re-sets the neck, routs pickup holes, stains and sprays before moving on to the final assembly...

PART 6



1 Getting the binding on was hard, scraping it flush was even harder, and it was the least enjoyable part of this restoration

It's well over a year since the freezing day when I bought hose for my steam needle tool to get this project underway. But that's enough nostalgia because the editor has told me it's time to get it finished – and he makes a fair point. So, this month I'll be binding the body, re-setting the neck, routing the pickup holes, staining, spraying and reassembling. If all goes to plan, there'll be a playable Gretsch at the end of it.

Body binding

Having glued the top back on, I needed to re-bind the top of the body. Had it not been for the extra thickness of the veneer, it would have been possible to reuse the original binding, which had come off intact. Instead, I used 1mm black from Rothko & Frost, and some 1.5mm off-white from Allparts UK.

Although the off-white was very pliable, the black too easily snapped when bent. With cutaways and curves to negotiate, I had to pre-bend the black binding by heating it with a hot air gun. I applied both layers simultaneously using Weld 16 plastic cement, holding the binding in place with some Rothko & Frost binding tape **1**.

It was a stressful and mucky experience, but I just about got away with it. Had I used a 0.5mm black layer and fixed the binding with Superglue gel, the result might have been better, and less scraping would have been required. Weld 16 is a very effective binding glue, but I would only consider using it again for single-colour binding, because black melts into white with potentially messy results.

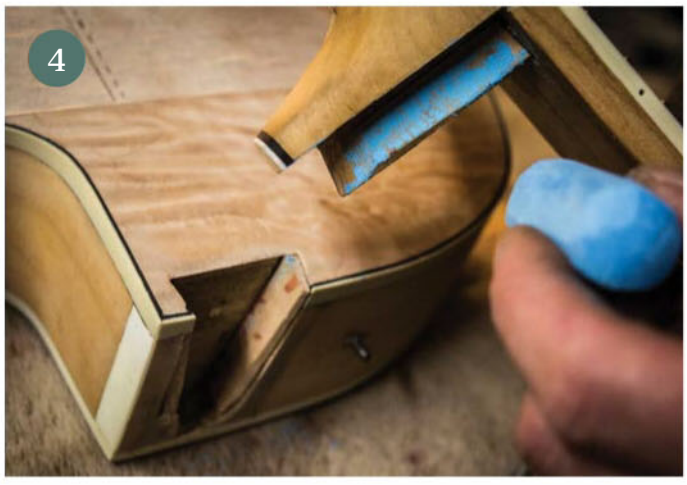
Neck re-set

Although I've built and restored a handful of acoustics, the neck sets have never been perfect. The angles have always been fine and, as far as I'm aware, the joints have never failed, but there have always been slight gaps between the heel and the body.

It quickly became apparent that this Gretsch neck re-set was going to be problematic. The sides were neither square nor straight and the original centre line didn't correspond with the actual centre of the body. There was also the issue of the joint itself, which was cut so badly that the Gretsch factory had built up a quarter-inch thick shim using mahogany veneer. I figured this old guitar deserved something better than my rudimentary woodworking ability, so it was back to Patrick Alexander's workshop in Bristol to get the job done properly.

Even with Patrick's daunting skills and specialist tools, this re-set took the best part of a day. Patrick began by establishing the centre line, with the original tailpiece mounted onto the body **2** **3**. Shims were made for the neck block to close the gap, and he gradually tightened the joint by filing away high spots that he identified using blue chalk **4**.

The heel edges had to be carefully shaped using chisels in order to conform the body's curves, and also to achieve the correct back angle **5** **6**. Considering this guitar had twice been stripped and sprayed, it's probable that the sides acquired their unwanted curves somewhere



along the way as a result of over-sanding. Eventually, Patrick decided the joint was as tight as it would ever be, so we applied hot hide glue and clamps before reinstating the neck screw (7). Since the screw is so far up the heel, it seems implausible that Gretsch used them in lieu of clamps.

We concluded it was more likely that the screws would have been introduced soon after the necks had been glued and clamped. Since hide glue grabs fast, maybe the screws were merely intended to hold the necks until the glue cured fully. After all, wood screws are cheaper than clamps when you're making hundreds of guitars.

Sounding board

With Patrick's warnings ringing in my ears, I duly waited 48 hours before putting the tuners and the shimmed nut back onto the guitar and stringing it up. I had long imagined this moment, and it was a thrill to find that everything lined up properly, with the strings equidistant from the board edges and a healthy break angle over the bridge. The tone was transformed from the dull and muted thud I heard when I first bought the guitar. After it had settled overnight, the Gretsch revealed its new voice with increased volume, brightness and sustain. I could hear the effect of the trestles too, with a firmer midrange and longer sustain than I would normally associate with traditionally made acoustic archtops.

Pickup positioning

With the Gretsch back up and running, and a working centre line established, it was time to position the pickups. Vintage 6120 owner Daniel Nicholas provided me with accurate measurements of polepiece positions relative to the 12th fret. However, the neck pickup looked strange when I used Daniel's dimensions.

The issue was that Anniversary models have one fret fewer than the 6120 – 21 rather than 22 – so the gap between the neck pickup and the end of the fingerboard seemed excessive. If I closed up the gap, the spacing between the neck and the bridge pickup increased – and that looked peculiar, too.

After much deliberation and moving things about, along with my Tennessean pickguard, I made a decision. In stock form, the octave harmonic coincides with the edge of the neck pickup cover. Since the harmonic is above the polepieces on Les Pauls and Strats, I figured the Gretsch's sound might actually benefit if I moved the neck pickup 1cm closer to the fingerboard. At the same time, I decided to maintain the standard gap between the pickups by moving the bridge pickup towards the neck, too (8) (9).

With the pickup positions decided, I drew around the covers, applied masking tape to protect the top and drilled pilot holes (10). Using my Dremel in a Stewart-MacDonald router base, I gradually cut through the top, taking the cuts fairly close to the braces and the edge lines before using my rasp and files to finesse the edges.

Vintage Filter'Trons have base plate extensions that sit in recesses >

(2) With the tailpiece, bridge and both E tuners mounted, we began the neck set by establishing a centre line

(3) The pencil marks show the discrepancy between the centre line of the neck, bridge and tailpiece and the actual centre line of the body

(4) Patrick applying chalk (and blood) to the neck and shim to identify the high spots

(5) Using a very sharp chisel to trim the heel, Patrick tightens the neck joint and achieves the desired back angle

6 This angle gauge was used to check progress towards a back angle of four degrees

7 After several hours, hot hide glue was applied and the neck was clamped

8 With the pickups positioned like a 6120, there was a sizeable gap between the end of the fingerboard and the neck pickup

9 Moving both pickups 1cm towards the neck closed the gap, and this Tennessean pickguard ensured that everything looked fine and lined up properly

routed into the top. These recesses are generally deeper than they need to be, and it's common to see vintage Filter'Trons jacked up on shims or foam rubber spacers to get them closer to the strings.

Since I didn't want to rout deeper that I needed to, I established the polepiece-to-string gaps I wanted with a set of TV Jones Setzer Signatures in a La Cabronita, figured out the pickup heights and the body-to-string gap on the Gretsch, then performed a simple calculation to determine the rout depth needed to achieve the required polepiece-to-string gap for the neck and bridge pickups.

The routs were done freehand using the Dremel. Although it sounds scary and the results are somewhat less than 'perfect', at least they look fairly authentic **11**. There's no doubt that the guys at the Gretsch factory routed freehand, and the results were occasionally chuckle-inducing.

With a set of pickups sitting in the routs and the guitar strung up, I made fine adjustments to the pickup positions to align the polepieces under the strings and drilled pilot holes for the cover screws.

Looming large

There was no way I was going to wait until this guitar was finished before trying it out, but to do so I had to make up a wiring loom. As I have mentioned previously, my plan was to configure this guitar as a 'hot rod' with simplified controls, so part of my reason for a test run was to decide whether I would be happy with master volume and tone controls.

Thankfully, a simplified loom was easy to assemble and install – the big pickup cutouts and wide f-holes providing easy access. To test the wiring and pickups, I drilled one hole in the position usually used for the neck pickup volume control. Should a future owner want to change to a vintage arrangement with a mud switch and individual volume controls, only two extra holes and a new loom would be required. Having established that I was happy with the hot-rodded wiring, after a week or so of Gretschy fun I forced myself to strip the guitar back down and get it ready for spraying.

On the dot

One of the dilemmas with vintage guitar restorations is whether to replicate some quirks and inconsistencies of the original manufacturing process that could be improved. Gretsch's approach to dot marker positioning on the side of the fingerboard is one example.

Most guitar manufacturers, then and now, would attempt to position the dots dead centre between the frets and between the top and bottom binding edges. In contrast, Gretsch simply 'eyeballed' it with inconsistent and occasionally alarming results.

I decided to 'eyeball' it too, but I was careful about it. Prior to the neck re-set, I had drilled 1/16" holes into the binding for the dots while I still had easy access. Daniel

Nicholas sent over fantastic close-up pictures of the dots on his vintage Gretsches and I mixed some red stain into Rustins natural grain filler to replicate the faded dirty pink appearance. The paste was pressed into the holes, allowed to dry and sanded flush 12 13.

The big 'O'

Gretsch used stain to achieve the iconic orange finish of the 6120 models but, just like vintage Gibsons, they were prone to fading. So, now you can look at a bunch of vintage 6120s and the colour shades will vary dramatically. This is good news for restorers because there is no 'correct' shade of orange. I collected pictures of examples I liked the look of to try to replicate their finishes.

Fortunately, this stage of the project coincided with a trip to Manchester, where I hooked up with Steve Robinson – aka Manchester Guitar Tech. I had previously sent him pictures of my favourite 6120s, and he kindly mixed up some amber and orange stains. Back home, I tried the stains on some maple veneer off-cuts, which I sprayed with tinted clear lacquer to get an impression of how they'd look after finishing. I went with Steve's amber stain diluted 50/50 with isopropyl alcohol for the neck and body, and Steve's orange mixed with medium brown and amber Colortone stains for the headstock overlay.

Prior to applying the stain, I filled the neck screw hole, scraped and sanded the entire guitar with 320-grit paper then rolled the corners of the replaced binding 14 15. For the top, I dampened the veneer to raise the grain and sanded it back – repeating the process three times. A torn-off piece of cotton t-shirt was used to apply the stain, which dried rapidly having been dissolved in alcohol.

Tests had already shown that the stain wouldn't penetrate the binding, so cleaning it off the plastic would be quick and easy. The whole guitar was sanded with 320-grit paper and wiped down with a tack cloth, then the staining and sanding process was repeated. After three cycles, the guitar was finally ready for spraying 16 17.

Get your coat on

As always, Manchester Guitar Tech supplied the necessary lacquer – a can of tinted clear and three cans of clear gloss. Compared to open-pore woods such as mahogany and rosewood, spraying maple is a breeze because no grain filler is required.

After emptying the body of splinters, sawdust and stray pieces of sandpaper, the guitar was carefully vacuumed and wiped down with tack cloth to remove any remaining dust, then stuffed with newspaper. The first few coats of tinted clear were misted on to seal the surface, while minimising the chances of the stain running 18.

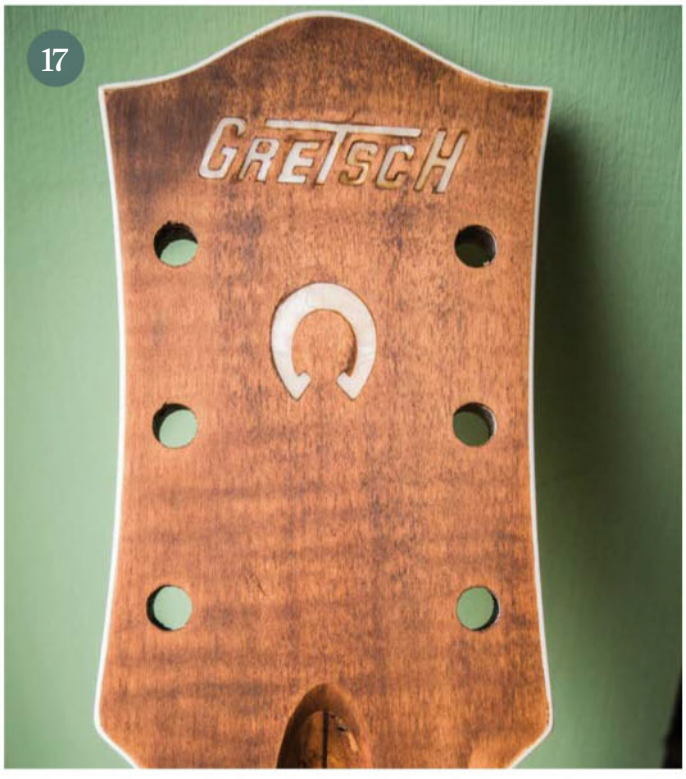
Once the tinted clear coats had mellowed the appearance sufficiently, I built up the clear coats with two cans of clear gloss, sanded back with 600-grit then >

10 The pickup positions were marked in pencil, then masking tape was applied to protect the top

11 A Dremel router, files and rasps were used to open up the pickup holes and create the recesses for the baseplate extensions

12 The dot marker holes were drilled prior to the neck reset, and here they are masked off to stop the stained paste getting where it shouldn't be

13 On the left is the dried paste with the tape removed, and on the right is a dot after the paste had been sanded flush



14 Black Milliput was used to pack the heel screw hole then scraped and sanded flush

15 Stanley knife blades are fine scrapers and make light work of removing the mucky old stain from the back and sides

16 After three cycles of staining and sanding, the body was finally ready for spraying

17 A slightly different stain mixture was applied to the headstock overlay to achieve a darker look

18 Yes, you can do this at home and my 'dedicated spray booth' is actually my garden shed

19 Wedgwood Brass was sceptical when told the freshly plated parts shouldn't look new, but they delivered exactly what was asked for

emptied a third can of clear gloss. Once the lacquer had cured, I cut it back with 800, 1200 and 1500-grade wet and dry paper, followed by 4000, 6000 and 8000-grit micromesh. No polishing compound was used because I prefer a softer sheen on relics and restoration projects.

Hardware

Having already owned the husk for a few years before starting this project, I managed to acquire the necessary parts along the way. Initially, I had planned to keep costs down by using repro parts and relic'ing them, but waiting gave me the opportunity to find some vintage bargains. Soon, I began to consider this guitar as a home for stray Gretsch parts.

The vintage parts eventually included a set of chrome Waverly tuners, a 60s V-cut Bigsby, an original pickguard bracket and a set of 60s Filter'Trons with gold covers. The space control bridge was original to the guitar, and since I preferred its sound to the bar bridge from my Tennessean, I decided to use it instead of a vintage-correct bar bridge.

The guitar also came with strap buttons and a gold pickguard with a square-cornered cut-out for a single DeArmond. I don't know if it was vintage or a reissue, but I suspect the latter. I cut Filter'Tron-style notches, along with a curved back edge into the pickguard, which was simple enough with a table router. Finally, I made a water slide signpost decal and chose a shade of greenish-gold at my local car paint suppliers to coat the back of the pickguard and repro pickup rings.

A 1960 Gretsch 6120 would have had gold-plated hardware, so the chrome tuners, pickguard bracket and strap buttons went to Wedgwood Brass, Cardiff (www.deniswedgwood.com) for gold plating **19**. The repro knobs, jack socket and switch were shaken about in a bag to induce surface scratching and dents, then I rubbed away some of the gold with Brasso to reveal the nickel base coat before dulling the metal in PCB etching fluid and washing everything thoroughly in water.

Rounding up

Although it would have been easy (perhaps easier) to do a vintage-correct 6120 conversion, that was never my intention. All along, I have been making my idealised version of a vintage 6120; keeping the features I wanted and ditching those I dislike,

such as the flat ebony fingerboard, zero fret, bright orange colour and convoluted controls. This is a guitar I intend to enjoy as a regular player rather than a wall hanger that only gets an outing when I need a 'special effect'.

So was it all worth it? I've put around £1,250 into this guitar, and had I been obliged to pay for all of this work to be done you could easily triple that. A refinished Gretsch Single Anniversary probably isn't worth more than £750, and a 6120 conversion is worth only what somebody is prepared to pay for it. Then again, Gretsch guru Ed Ball estimates the value of quilted top 6120s from the 1960 359 batch at $12K-$16K.

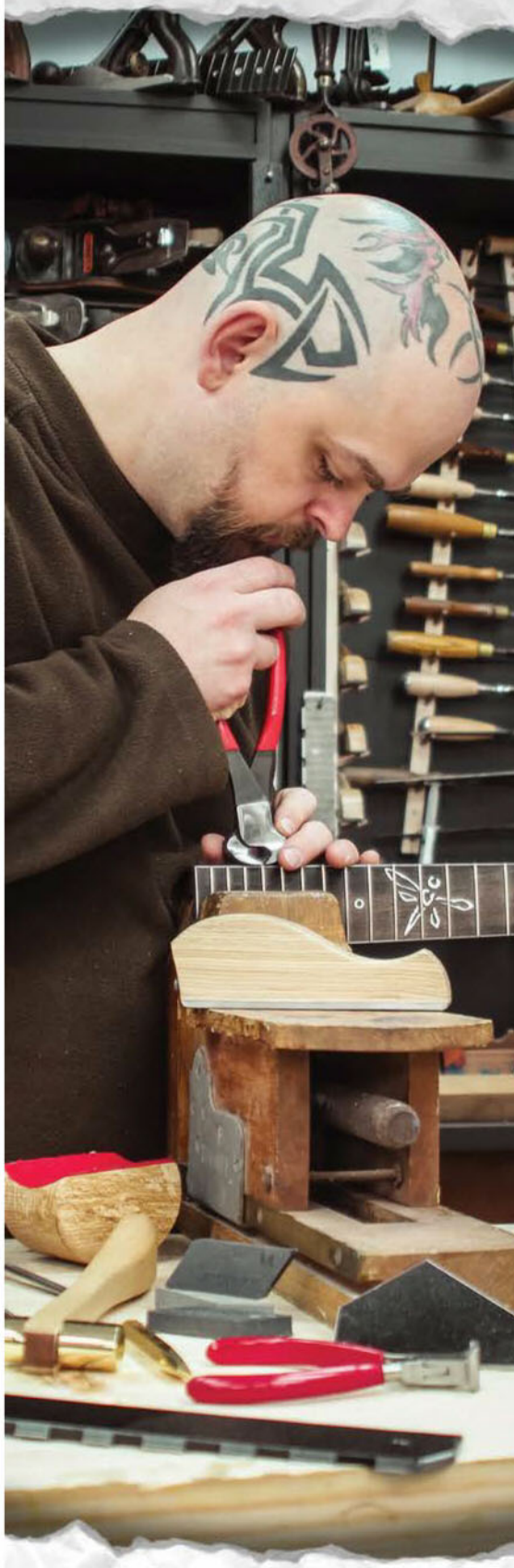
This was a very personal project that was all about creating the Gretsch I've been dreaming about since the 1980s. Although I'm not in the habit of naming guitars, I'm calling this one Clyde because it's so big and orange. I've learned a lot along the way, and greatly enjoyed the whole process. Now, turn the page to see pictures of the finished guitar – maybe some of you will feel inspired to try something similar...

Huw sends his thanks to the late Gene Sword for making such a fine start on this restoration out in Oklahoma City, plus Daniel Nicholas, Patrick Alexander and Steve Robinson, without whose help, encouragement and expertise I couldn't have done this.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw continues his quest to replicate all the guitars we drool over but can't afford by turning a low-end Les Paul into a P-90 Goldtop with a wrapover tailpiece

crimson
BOUTIQUE GUITARS, TOOLS & TRAINING



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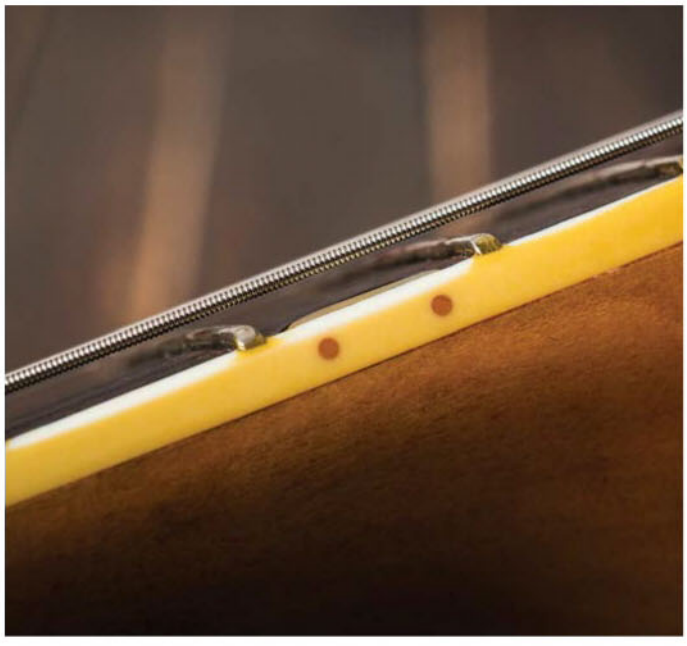
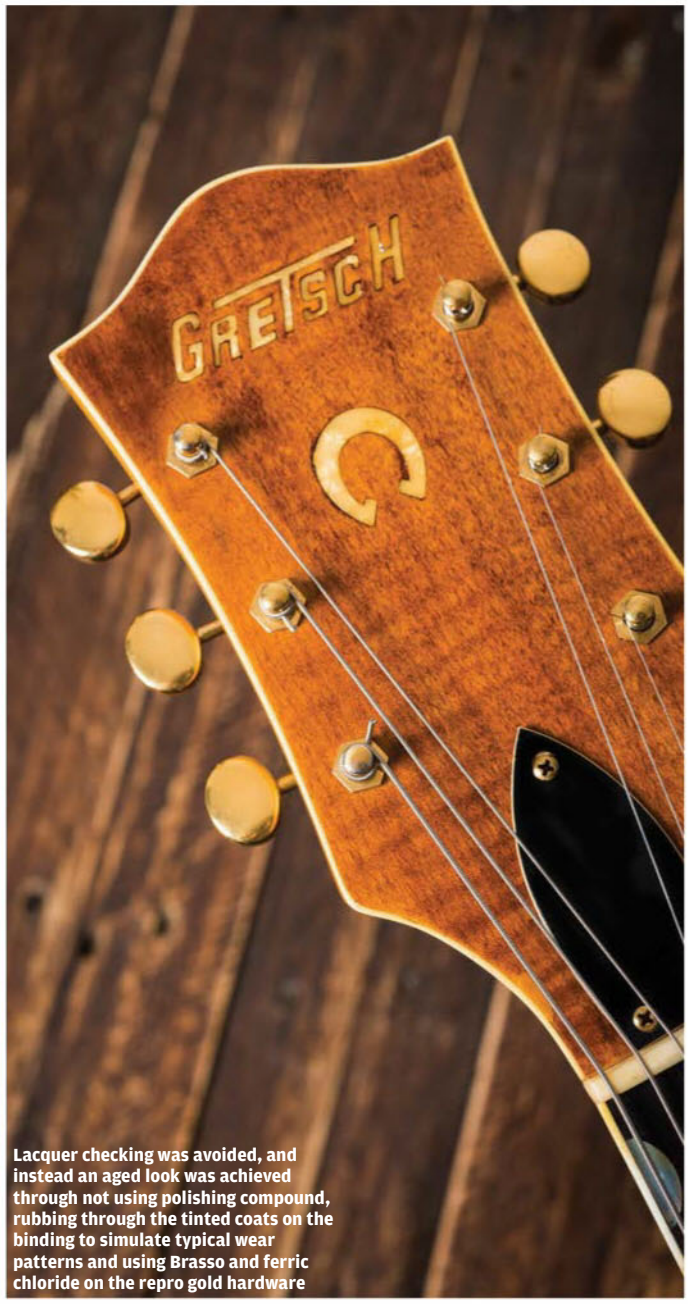




Lacquer checking was avoided, and instead an aged look was achieved through not using polishing compound, rubbing through the tinted coats on the binding to simulate typical wear patterns and using Brasso and ferric chloride on the repro gold hardware

Eastman Antique Varnish SB59/V

One of the stars of Winter NAMM 2017 lands in the UK. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** checks out a new way of making things old...

Anyone who has ever attended the Winter NAMM Show in Anaheim, California will agree that for all the excitement that it generates around new gear, it's one of the most challenging environments on earth in which to attempt to make a value judgement about what something sounds like. And yet every year there are one or two rare moments in which somebody hands you a guitar and the free-jazz hurricane of the show melts into the periphery of your senses.

Suddenly you're lost as the pure experience of playing an instrument – or perhaps a well-chosen combination of guitar and amplifier – breaks down the physical barriers between the player and the music they find themselves creating. And if that sounds pretentious, blame the combination of jetlag and a hangover.

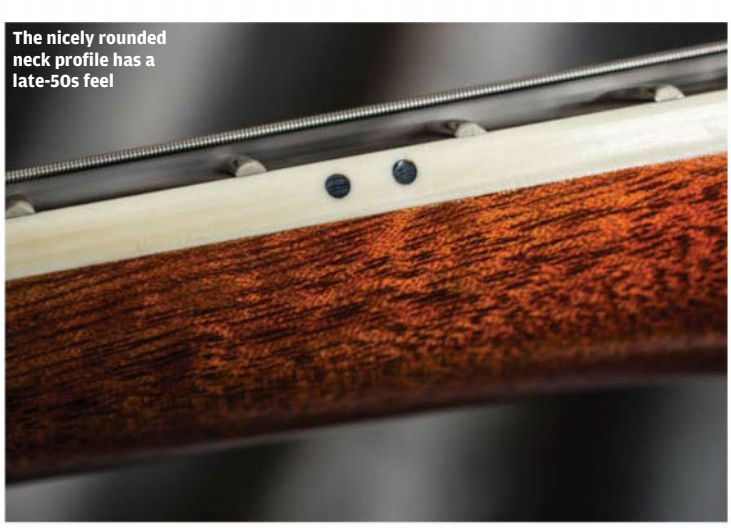
We had two such moments this year, the first of which was brought about by a Walsh Guitars Nesher (a boutique offset with a crazily good roasted maple neck and gorgeous-sounding McNelly pickups) into a new, 6V6-loaded Bad Cat. The second was on the Eastman Guitars stand.

For the uninitiated, here's a history lesson: the Eastman Strings company was founded in 1992 by Qian Ni, a Chinese national who had travelled to the USA to study music. Ni established master violin and bow-making facilities in his home country, seeking to emulate the traditions of the late 19th Century European workshops. Following the principles of hand-crafting and affordability, Eastman moved into archtop guitars, mandolins, flat-top acoustics and electrics.

Back at NAMM 2017, we had our first encounter with Eastman's new Antique Varnish series of electric guitars, including several vintage-inspired thinline and hollowbody models and the SB59/V – the company's first solidbody. Plugging into a 3rd Power Amps Wooly Coats combo (think boutique Princeton), we were left fairly smitten by the ES-330 style T64/V, the 6120-influenced T58/V and this curvaceous rewrite of a rather influential late-50s singlecut from Michigan.

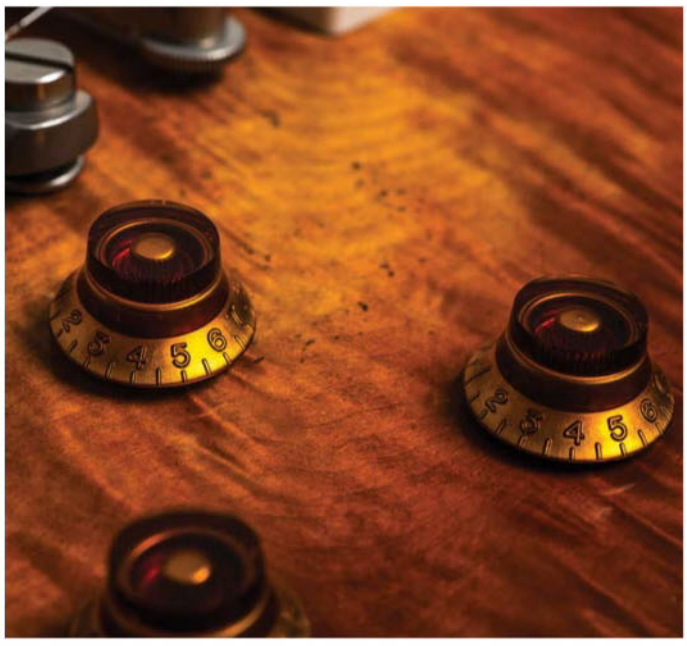
The first thing you notice when you pick up any of these guitars is the aged Antique Varnish finish, which is unlike the faux distressed paint jobs you'll find elsewhere in the market (find out more about the process on p61). As it's not nitrocellulose lacquer, there's no checking, but you do get an attractive patina that gives the instrument a kind of old guitar look and feel straight out of the case. The French-polished top coat contains shellac and is softer >

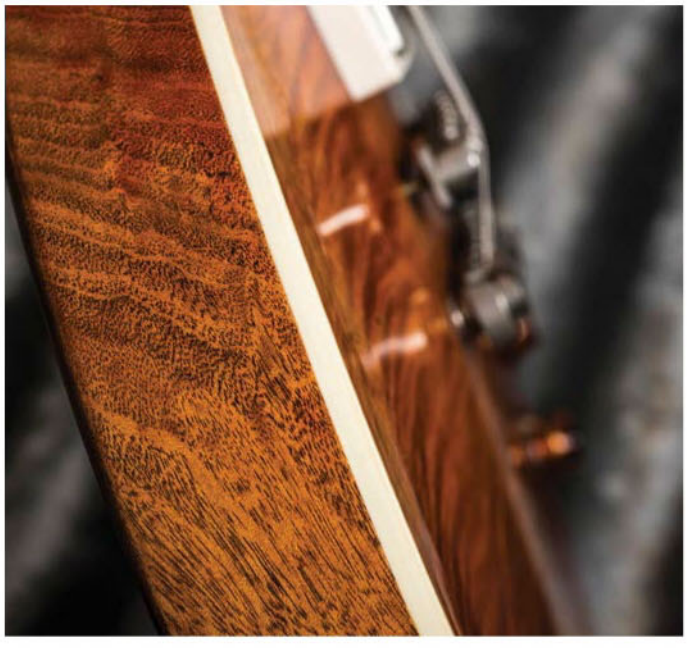
The first thing you notice about this Eastman is the aged Antique Varnish finish, which is unlike the faux distressed paint jobs you'll find elsewhere in the market

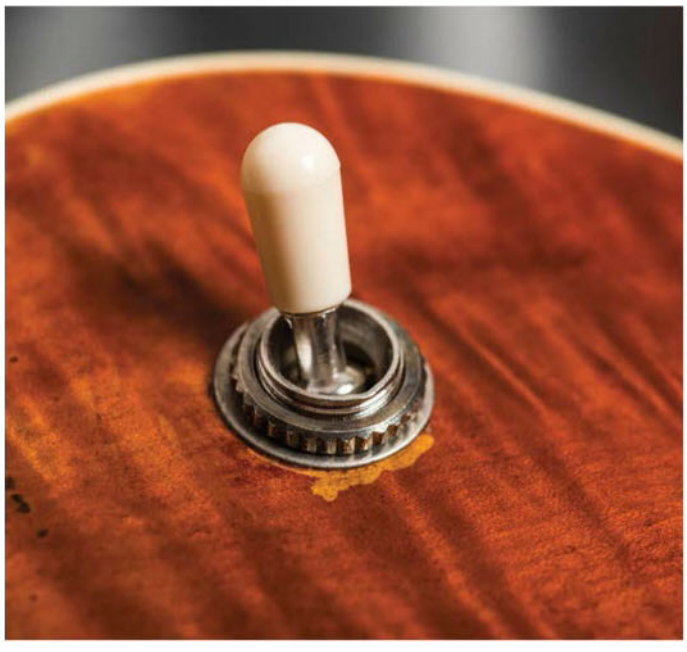
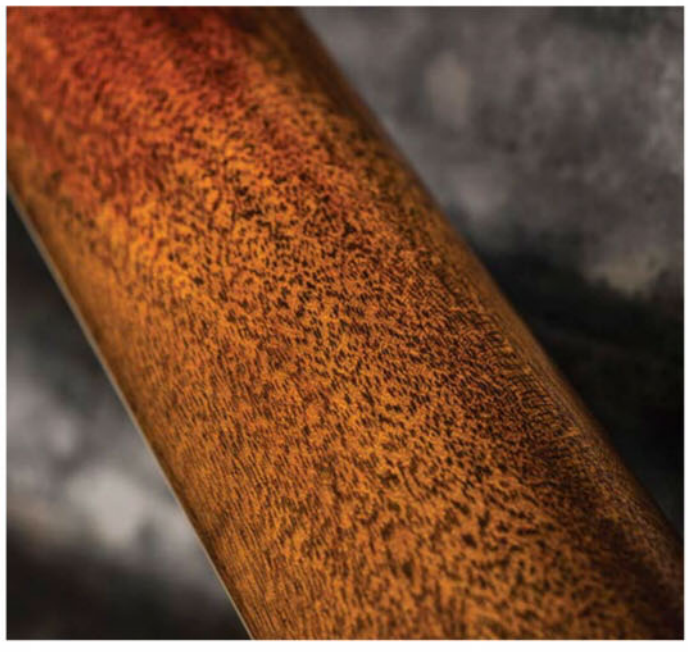

The nicely rounded neck profile has a late-50s feel

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £1,769
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cutaway solidbody electric guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** Solid one-piece mahogany back with solid, figured bookmatched maple top. One-piece mahogany neck with 12-inch radius bound ebony fingerboard and ebony headstock fascia. Bone nut. 22 Jescar FW47104-P nickel silver frets. Pearl inlays
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, vintage-style machineheads with aged plastic buttons
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Seymour Duncan Antiquity humbucking pickups with individual volume and tone controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.4mm at nut, 53.1mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.3mm at nut, 25.6mm at 12th fret
- **WEIGHT** 8.6lbs/3.9kg
- **FINISHES** Antique Amber (as reviewed), Antique Classic
- **CONTACT** Eastman Musical Instruments Europe **www.eastmanguitars.eu**





Unlike a traditional Les Paul, the Eastman's neck is one-piece mahogany with no headstock wings. The fascia and fingerboard are ebony

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson Custom's **True Historic '59 Les Paul** aged by Tom Murphy is – wait for it – **£8,999**, but it's the closest that the Nashville company has ever got to capturing the essence of a vintage Burst. A smarter choice might be to pick up a used Collector's Choice model and drop a set of Monty's PAFs in it: several friends of the mag have done just that and ended up with monster guitars for significantly less cash. The highly-rated **Rock N Roll Relics Heartbreaker Ice Tea £3,299** is hand-built in San Francisco and features Dave Allen pickups. In the same price range as the Eastman from the Gibson stable is the **Les Paul Traditional T 2017 £1,849**, which comes equipped with Burstbuckers and a hi-gloss nitrocellulose finish.

less resistant to stains than a nitro or poly finish. That said, it's easier to blend in repairs, and we're guessing that if you are attracted to this type of aesthetic in the first place then the prospect of adding your own playing wear to the areas where the amber colour coat has been rubbed through at the factory is appealing.

Seymour Duncan's alnico II-loaded, Antiquity humbuckers lend the guitar a lively, airy quality that's a satisfying platform for anything you throw at it

There's also a redder Antique Classic finish available, but if neither are your thing then the regular Eastman SB59 model is available in pristine nitro for £1,399. We'd love to see an Antique Varnish version of a lemon burst.

The one-piece mahogany back is bonded to a highly-figured, bookmatched flame maple cap that has vivid, three-dimensional shimmer as it moves under light, and while construction generally follows the LP tradition, departures include a one-piece mahogany neck with no 'wings' on a headstock outline that we prefer to the larger, more flared design on Eastman's thinline and archtop models. 22 Jescar nickel silver, medium-jumbo frets have been installed neatly over the binding, so there's a little more playing area available than that offered by the traditional Gibson method, and there's no chance of strings catching on nibs.

The fingerboard, headstock fascia and truss-rod cover are ebony, the visible grain and lighter areas of which are more pleasing in combination with the body's amber hue than a jet-black variety might be. Some buffing compound is visible in the pores of the headstock veneer, but as our review model is a prototype we'll give Eastman the benefit of the doubt – in any case, it's something we've seen from other brands on USA-made instruments of twice the price.

There's no Les Paul-style sliver of maple visible in the cutaway, but lifting out the bridge humbucker reveals that the solid maple cap has a healthy depth of 16mm at its thickest point. Popping out the neck pickup reveals a long neck tenon extending about two thirds of the way into the pickup cavity – it all bodes well for old-school tonal depth and sustain.

In use

Dimensionally, the Eastman's neck feels closer to a typical R8 than an R9, but given the variation between nominally identical Gibson reissue models, let alone original Les Pauls, we're talking in rather general terms. Regardless, the Eastman's nicely-rounded profile means there's a satisfying fatness but not too much shoulder and, in combination with the soft sheen and played-in feel of the Antique Varnish finish, it's easy-playing and endlessly expressive. Even unplugged, there's a pleasing sweetness and sustain in the SB59/V's natural voice.

When you do plug in, the story remains a happy one; Seymour Duncan's alnico II-loaded, unpotted Antiquity humbuckers lend the guitar a lively, airy quality that's a hugely satisfying platform for almost anything you throw at it. The sonic signature reminds us a little of the Seth Baccus Nautilus we reviewed recently, loaded with Bare Knuckle VH II humbuckers: there's some PAF-like extended treble and a slightly softened lower-midrange, and the result is at once more vintage-sounding and more versatile than the syrupy mids of many single-cut instruments.

With the SB59/V hooked up to a clean-ish 6V6 combo, single-note lines are vocal and deliciously creamy, with audible bloom. The ebony fingerboard brings a little extra definition and snap and there's a selection of high-grade clean tones that you might not expect from an instrument that shares so many common features with a guitar coveted by several generations of hard-rockers – don't forget that original Bursts are capable of some of the prettiest cleans you'll ever hear and can even do country convincingly. Here, chiming arpeggios are remarkably well served.

Although proceedings darken up rather more than we'd like when the volume controls are rolled back, there's little to complain about in full-throated, wide-open drive mode. When the amp is cranked or a Tube Screamer is introduced (and the low end and mids really snap into focus with the latter), from classic-rock crunch to fluid, sustaining lead, it's all present and correct.

We think Eastman is really onto something with its Antique Varnish series. Most of us walk into a guitar shop or research a potential purchase with the model closely associated with our playing heroes in mind, but if we take a more pragmatic view, the reality is that you'd have to spend an awful lot more cash than this to get an aged finish with a play-me vibe and tones on a par with the SB59/V from an American-made instrument – either from a boutique maker or with a famous logo on its headstock.

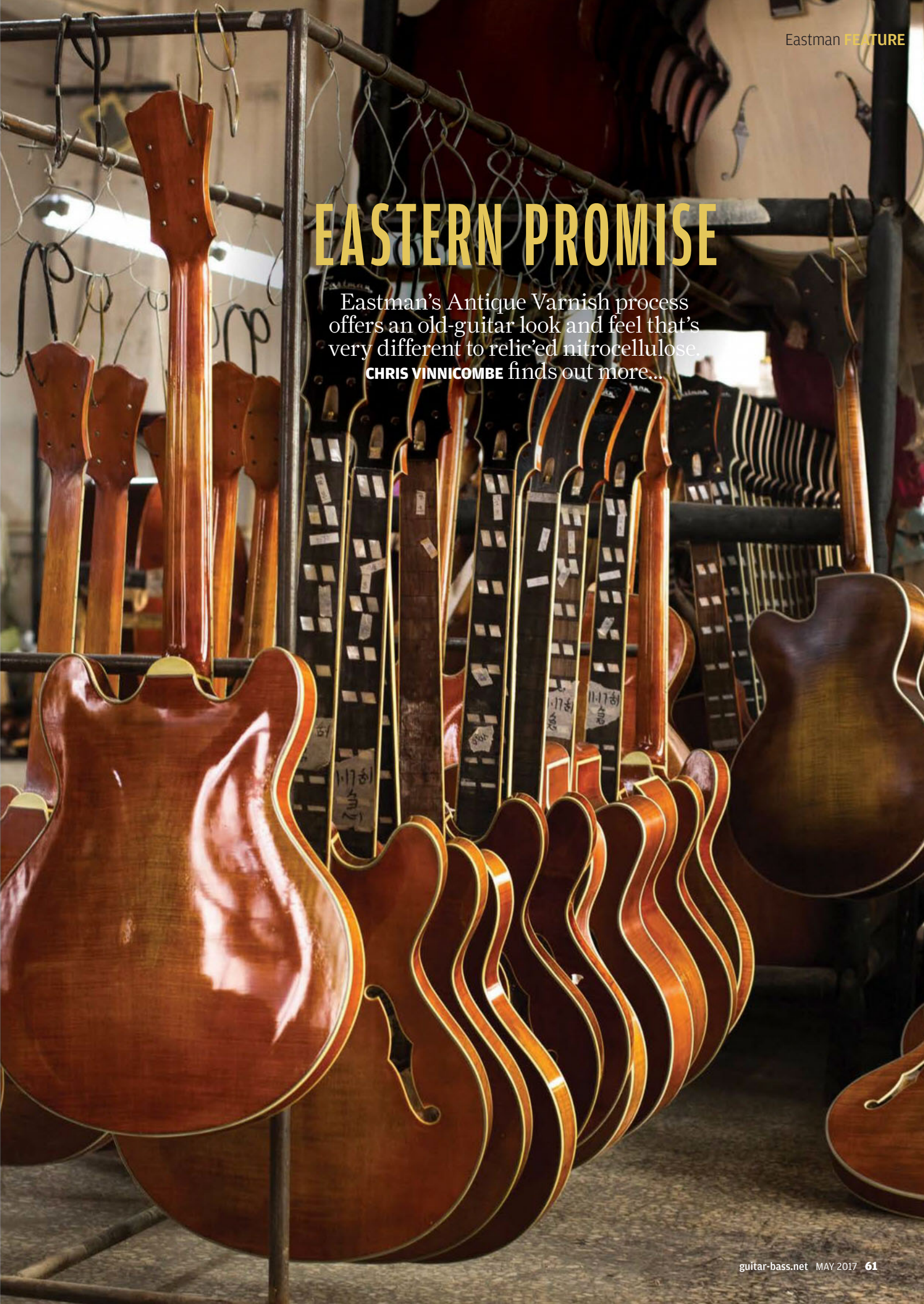
Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Vintage-like feel and sounds make it difficult to put down
+ Custom Shop vibe at a production line price
+ Great to see a different approach in the me-too aged guitar market

– Brighter volume roll-off would make for even more versatility

A tremendously playable single-cut with an expressive array of tones and an old-guitar aesthetic vintage fans will love

9/10



EASTERN PROMISE

Eastman's Antique Varnish process offers an old-guitar look and feel that's very different to relic'ed nitrocellulose. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** finds out more...

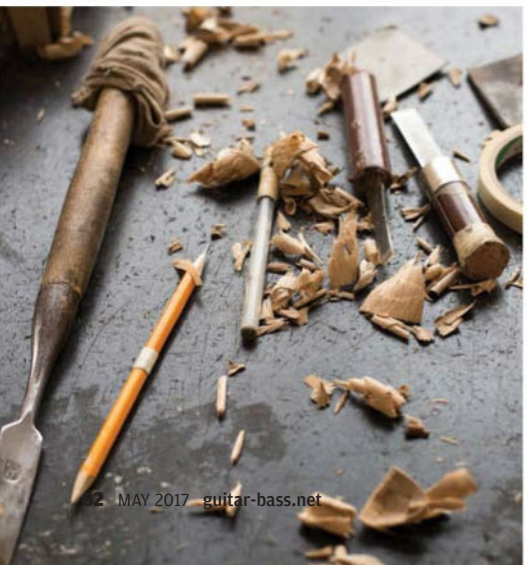
"Eastman violins have always distinguished themselves with their varnish, and especially their beautifully antiquated look and feel. My idea was to bring that beauty to the guitar division," says Eastman Europe director and product manager Pepijn 't Hart when we quiz him about the company's Antique Varnish finishing process.

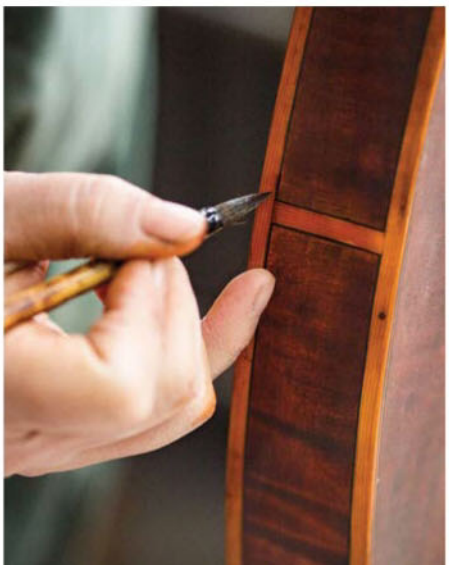
The roots of the proprietary process go back to the earliest days of company founder Qian Ni's workshop in China. Li Hua Rong, who manages Eastman's Beijing-based high-end varnishing department, is willing to shed some light on how the unique finish is achieved. "The process itself," she explains, "features six distinct steps, starting with base coat application to fill the grain, directly moving to colour application and concluding with the French polish."

Ultimately, three or four coats are applied and sanded thin, and the result is softer than lacquer, which the company claims creates a smoother tone and provides a suitable surface for ageing techniques that Li is reluctant to reveal even to members of the company's inner circle.

As someone more familiar with violins than guitars, Li initially needed Pepijn to illustrate the areas in which a guitar would naturally wear over decades of playing. "It was very funny," he remembers. "Li asked me to air guitar the sample instrument I brought to the varnish shop. There were no strings on the guitar, just a body and neck. I played it as if I'd just joined the Stones and she took notes about where and how a body should age naturally.

"When I wanted to see how their famous antiquing process was done, she firmly shut down and told me it was a secret and not for anyone to witness!" However she does it, it certainly creates a distinctive look and feel and brings something genuinely new to the artificially-aged guitar market.





THE MAN WHO DROVE A NAIL

with a dream.

MARTY WAS AN ASPIRING SONGWRITER. ONE DAY, HE DECIDED TO HAMMER A NAIL INTO A WALL. "THIS IS WHERE I WILL HANG MY FIRST GOLD RECORD," HE DECLARED—WHICH WAS A BOLD PROCLAMATION, ESPECIALLY COMING FROM A GUY WHOSE NEXT BEST OPTION WAS A JOB WRITING TOASTER MANUALS. FOR SIX LONG YEARS HE WALKED BY THAT EMPTY NAIL. AND SO DID HIS WIFE AND THREE KIDS. THIS TOOK GUTS. PARTICULARLY AFTER EATING MASHED POTATOES COVERED IN 69-CENT GRAVY FROM A PACKET. BUT MARTY PERSEVERED. FOCUSED ON SUCCESS. UNTIL ONE DAY, A GOLD RECORD HUNG ON THAT NAIL, AND THEN A PLATINUM NEXT TO IT. HIS STORY REMINDS US THAT THE WORLD COULD USE MORE DREAMERS LIKE MARTY. *For more on Marty and other stories of courage that inspire us, visit taylorguitars.com*

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REVELATION RTJ60M TL £289
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Revelation RTJ60M TL

Very few guitars offer 24 different sounds as standard. **MARCUS LEADLEY** checks out a flexible, fun and cost-effective option

Alan Entwistle, Revelation's designer, has a couple of what you might call 'signature moves'. Firstly, he loves to emulate the specs of different classic instruments. Secondly, if there's a switch/mod that can be included on his guitars as standard you can be sure it'll feature.

The RTJ60M TL wears a mash-up of Fender influences on its sleeve; the body shape pays homage to the Jazzmaster, but the upper-rear bout sports an f-hole and is chambered like a Thinline Tele. The twin humbuckers are a nod towards the Tele Deluxe. However, there's a coil-split for single-coil sounds – so we're back to offset tradition. The S-type vibrato bridge and the comfy neck, with a lacquered maple fingerboard and skunk stripe down the back, offer a more Strat-like vibe, while the white neck binding and block pearloid fingerboard inlays are a late-60s Jazzmaster reference.

The body is made from the African hardwood Okoume, a relatively lightweight timber with a history of use in guitar making – especially in high-end acoustics. The pickups are Entwistle's own H90 humbuckers, and there's a master tone and volume control with high-quality pots that have a nicely resistive feel. The coil-split is a push/pull on the tone control, so there are no unnecessary switches. Now for the chickenhead knob on the forward upper bout: the ATN-5 circuit offers four positions, plus a bypass. These are basically passive tone presets – and while they can, of course, be used in any way you like, they're referred to as: 1 Vintage/Surf; 2 Country/Rock; 3 Blues/Rock and 4 Jazz.

In use

The RTJ60M TL has a rich acoustic sound, easily loud enough for unplugged playing. The basic bridge humbucker clean tone is a little boxy for strumming chords, however setting the ATN-5 to either position 3 or 4 cleans up the output nicely and adds some spank.

If you want more twang from the bridge pickup, pull the coil-split for glassy highs. It's ATN-5 position 1 that offers the most top-end roll-off, so a soupy, warm 50s-style rhythm sound is there if you need it. Moving to the twin-pickup setting (which is wired out of phase), the humbuckers give you plenty of clean crunch and a funky vibe; coil tapped, there's plenty of Fender-style quack. The neck pickup delivers ample sustain and rich, emotional tones for jazz or prog-inspired soloing. There are so many great drive tones it's hard to explore them all in one sitting. Broadly speaking, the humbuckers do hard rock, metal and 70s blues and the single-coil settings have a more wiry 60s vibe with all the contemporary pop or alt-rock energy you're likely to need. Using the ATN-5 presets is especially appealing with big rock chords, as you can easily nuance your tone from verse to verse or create a densely layered wall of tone in the studio. The tone control works incrementally, like a good control should, and the knob stays exactly where you set it. The range of tonal voices this guitar can deliver is pretty much endless.

Broadly speaking, the humbuckers do hard rock, metal and 70s blues, and the single-coil settings have a wiry 60s vibe

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

We reviewed the **Squier Deluxe Jazzmaster With Tremolo £350** back in April and described it as "a lot of guitar" for the money with near-perfect specifications. If you have to have a semi, check out the **Italia Maranello '61 £655** and **Reverend**'s **Stu D Baker Signature £749**.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Loads of different sounds
+ Excellent value for money
+ High-quality materials for the price

– A little on the heavy side for a thinline
– No body chamfering
– Paint splash visible through f-hole

With features inspired by several classics, this cheap and toneful offset semi covers a lot of ground in the studio and on the road

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Revelation RTJ60M TL

- **PRICE** £289 (case not included)
- **DESCRIPTION** Chambered electric guitar, made in China
- **BUILD** Okoume body, bolt-on maple neck with 22-fret maple fingerboard. NuBone nut
- **HARDWARE** Revelation Contemporary Vintage tremolo bridge, Revelation Contemporary Vintage tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Entwistle H90 humbucker pickup, master tone and volume controls, 3-way pickup selector, ATN-5 tone preset switch, coil-split push/pull (on tone control)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 647mm/ 25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.2mm at nut, 53.2mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.8mm at first fret, 22.2mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.8lbs/3.5kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (Greenburst only)
- **FINISHES** Sea Foam Green, Greenburst
- **CONTACT** Sutherland Trading 02920 887333 **www.sutherlandtrading.com**

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Vintage V6P Custom Spec P90 Vibrato

Fancy a swanky boutique look without spending top dollar? **MARCUS LEADLEY** finds out whether the V6P sounds as good as it looks

A book-matched flame cherry burst top with a white pearloid scratchplate is the sort of upmarket option you'd find in a Vigier, Melancon or Tom Anderson catalogue, but here we have a very smart example on a sub-£400 guitar from Vintage, the brainchild of UK designer Trev Wilkinson. It's a real-wood veneer and looks nicely three-dimensional.

Moving past the flashy look to the substance, we find a three-piece alder body – and the barely visible joints are a telltale sign that we are dealing with solid timbers rather than a further laminate hiding unspecified wood. The drop-top carve over the rear bout and chamfered waist make the instrument super-comfortable to play and reinforce the sense of quality production. The neck's made from a single, unjointed piece of maple and the 22-fret rosewood fingerboard has nicely rounded edges for a played-in feel.

All the fret tangs are hidden out of harm's way and the medium-gauge fretwire makes for a smooth, even feel. The neck feels great and the satin urethane finish is reminiscent of Fender production from the early 2000s. The guitar's set-up is spot-on, delivering a fine low action with excellent intonation. Tuning is easy and precise, as the Wilkinson machineheads are designed along vintage Kluson lines.

The S-type vibrato bridge is set up well for both forward and reverse bends – however, the protruding grub screws on the lower E and A strings feel a little sharp to the palm of the right hand.

Rather than sport a trio of standard single coils, the V6P has three stacked, humbucking Wilkinson WP90SKs. These have developed a great reputation, as they're designed to deliver single-coil sounds but with noise-free operation. The five-way selector and master tone and volume controls provide a simple but effective control layout with the promise of broadly familiar tonal options and voice characteristics.

The pickups are a clever design, with ceramic magnets and plenty of winds – they're powerful and noise-free

Sounds

Unplugged, the V6P has a bright, clear tone and the sustain is remarkable. The pickups are a clever design, featuring ceramic magnets and plenty of winds, so they're powerful and noise-free. There's plenty of character and bite, but none of the sharpness that can be associated with ceramics. Their tonal character and performance makes the V6P ideal for the home recording or studio musician. They don't have quite the microphonic openness of vintage-style P-90s, and the break-up into amp distortion is controlled and less raggedly aggressive. That said, the different voices articulate very well and higher gain settings deliver hard-rock and even metal drive tones. There's a smooth delivery that sits well with the boutique vibe and suits extended legato soloing. The tone pot is a great asset if you like to smooth things out. At lower drive settings, winding back the tone delivers a wide range of classic jazz solo and chord comping voices. The five selector settings deliver distinct character changes with out-of-phase settings at positions two and four, and these are especially good, delivering plenty of quack and twang to suit a wide range of pop, rock and country players.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Squier's **Vintage Modified Stratocaster** **£310** offers three single-coil pickups and a vibrato bridge. The **Michael Kelly 1963** **£449** combines a vintage vibe with two single coils and a humbucker in the bridge position. Looking for three P-90s, a rosewood fingerboard and a vibrato? You'll need to spend more elsewhere: **£699** gets you a cool **Reverend Jetstream 390**.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ An excellent array of sounds
+ Easy playing with a great set-up
+ High-end looks

- Purists won't find vintage-style Strat or P-90 tones here
- Derivative aesthetic

An excellent instrument for live performance and studio work, the V6P delivers a refined look, feel and sound that punches above its price point

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Vintage V6P Custom Spec P90 Vibrato

- **PRICE** £349
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar, made in China
- **BUILD** 3-piece alder body with flame maple veneer top. Bolt-on maple neck with 22-fret rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Wilkinson WVC vibrato bridge, WJ55 EZ-Lok tuners, white graphite nut
- **ELECTRICS** 3x Wilkinson WP90SK pickups (stacked humbuckers), master tone and volume controls, 5-way blade pickup selector
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.5mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23.2mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.8lbs/3.53kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Flame Cherry Burst only
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 01132 865381 **www.jhs.co.uk**

TAYLOR GUITARS

Thank The Academy

Taylor's new Academy Series has its sights set squarely on the affordable end of the market. **HUW PRICE** tests out the 10E and 12E models while *G&B* heads to Mexico to see them roll off the production line...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Academy 10e

The **Breedlove Pursuit £577** features a cutaway body made from laminated ebony and a solid Adirondack spruce top with a gloss finish, bone nut and a Fishman Isys USB pickup system. The sitka spruce/mahogany **Guild D-140 CE £759** is an all-solid cutaway dreadnought with a Fishman Sonitone pickup system. You could also consider an Expression 2-loaded **Taylor 110e £640**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Academy 12e

The **Faith Naked** series shares Taylor's no-frills philosophy, so check out the all-solid mahogany/spruce **Neptune £465** with its Shadow Performer pickup system. With a torrefied solid spruce top and laminated rosewood back and sides, the **Yamaha LS6 ARE £511** has an SRT Zero Impact Pickup.

You might not usually associate acoustic giant Taylor with entry-level instruments, but that's what the Academy Series is all about. Even so, the Academy models are not your average beginner guitars, because rather than appeal to our inner magpies with glossy finishes and gleaming bling, Taylor has prioritised tone and playability.

It's a sign of confidence when a guitar manufacturer feels it has nothing to hide. Clearly, an entry-level guitar has to hit a price point, and Taylor has done so by stripping back any extraneous and non-essential features. In doing so, the 'skeletons' of the guitars are left bare.

The complete absence of binding means we can see that the back and sides are made from laminated wood with sapele outer layers. We can also see that the top is solid sitka spruce, and the accuracy of the heel and headstock joints is up there with the top Taylors. Taylor's master luthier, Andy Powers, understands that experienced players can work around issues and imperfections in an instrument, but beginners need all the help they can get. Academy models are therefore designed to feel as comfortable as possible.

One particular feature comes as a genuine surprise. In recent years, high-end luthiers have started putting angled armrests on the lower bout to enhance player comfort. However, it's the last thing we would expect to see on entry-level guitars. Yet all the Academy models have a chamfer, and it's part and parcel of Powers' concept of placing no obstacles in the way of the player. It goes hand in hand with the slim necks, low action and 24 7/8" scale length. Although the backs are laminated, they are not merely nondescript slabs of ply. Viewed from the side, you can see that the backs have a pronounced arch that was formed on a mold when the layers were glued together. Regular acoustic backs are arched, too, but the arch is formed by gluing solid or laminated plates to curved braces. Pressed plywood holds its shape and is so structurally strong that no braces are required.

The 12e is even more of an all-rounder. It's a clear and chiming rhythm instrument, but as a fingerpicker it's an absolute gem

Countless archtop and semi-solid guitars are made with pressed plywood fronts and backs. It's also the way Guild built many of its great acoustics, and the tap tone of laminated plates can be impressive. Placing a hand across the bridge, you can feel the percussive effect when you tap the backs of these guitars, and all over you'll find clear and ringing notes that bode well. Decoration is minimal, with a rope pattern wood/fibre rosette and Italian acrylic fingerboard dots. Both guitars have chrome-plated die-cast tuners, a Tusq nut and Micarta compensated saddle. The fingerboard is specified as ebony and the bridge matches nicely.

Three pickup sensors are located behind the saddle rather than under it, which is now standard practice across Taylor's product line. They feed an onboard preamp located on the upper bout, featuring an LED display for the tuner and low battery indication, plus tone and volume controls. The system is powered by two lithium (CR2032) batteries, providing approximately 300 hours of playing time, and you can access the batteries externally.

It's unusual to see a high-end feature such as this armrest on an entry-level acoustic

After three minutes without use, the system automatically shuts down to maximise battery life.

Academy 10e

Essentially, these guitars are identical in every respect besides the body shape and internal volume. Therefore, having already described the common features, we can keep the model specifics to a minimum here. The 10e has a dreadnought body measuring 15 inches across and four inches deep.

In use

It's easy to sound good on the 10e because the tonal balance is very even, little playing effort is required to get the top moving and there's no excessive boominess to cope with. The nut slots are also cut accurately, so you can tune the strings open and expect cowboy chords to sound in tune.

Although there's ample bass power, it doesn't dominate and – combined with soft and sweet treble – the midrange is prominent and clear. This puts the 10e firmly into all-rounder territory because it's equally capable of generating strong rhythms and fingerstyle parts with even string response and balance.

Academy 12e

This is Taylor's own Grand Concert body shape, and although you might reasonably suppose it's smaller than the 10e, the depth and width are pretty much the same. However, the 12e has a pinched waist, so the body holds less air than the dreadnought's.

In Use

The tighter waist sharpens the focus without compromising bass depth. In fact, since the definition is crisper and the attack more percussive, the 12e is the deeper sounding of the two review guitars. The treble also breathes a little more freely, which contributes a harmonic shimmer that's less apparent with the 10e.

If anything, the 12e is even more of an all-rounder. It's a clear and chiming rhythm instrument, but as a fingerpicker it's an absolute gem. String-to-string balance is very even and it's easy to pick arpeggios without rogue notes jumping out at you. The 12e has no problems with dropped tunings, and open tunings bring out its more ethereal and intriguing qualities.

We rarely plug in an electro-acoustic and feel excited about the untreated sound, but the 10e's pickup system produces such a well-balanced, enjoyable and realistic tone we found it hard to put down. In comparison, the 12e sounds a little thinner and less balanced, but that could simply indicate that the sensors need adjusting. However, it may be that the dreadnought's fuller midrange and softer treble combine more effectively with the inherent brightness of piezo sensors.

A top brand targeting the entry level is a risky undertaking because it's easy to lose the allure. Having owned and disliked a certain brand of amp or guitar as a novice, you may be less likely to aspire to an up-market version of the same make later on, and we have observed this fate befall various companies. Taylor's approach to the entry level seems like a shrewd move because these are such easy-playing and enjoyable guitars that there's nothing about either of them to dislike or even criticise. Then again, there's 'entry level' and there's 'Taylor entry level', and you will find alternatives of comparable quality at similar or even lower price points. Without doubt, the Academy models sound more than good enough for beginners and even intermediate players. In fact, we would be surprised to see many turning up on the second-hand market because your starter Taylor may end up being your much-loved beach party/campervan/busking Taylor a few years down the line.

KEY FEATURES

Taylor Academy 10e

- **PRICE** £659
- **DESCRIPTION** Dreadnought-sized electro-acoustic six-string guitar, made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Solid sitka spruce top with laminated sapele back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony bridge and fingerboard, Lexan peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, chrome die-cast tuners, Tusq nut and Micarta saddle
- **ELECTRICS** ES-B pickup system
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, no extra charge
- **FINISH** Satin body and neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 631.52mm/24 7/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 21mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.95kg/4.31lbs
- **CONTACT** Big Fish Studios 01206 382224 **www.taylorguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Well-proportioned bass
+ Slim, easy-playing neck
+ Balanced mids
+ Impressive electric tone

– Slightly soft treble
– No cutaway option

An easy-playing and fine-sounding dreadnought that sounds equally good plugged in and unplugged

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Taylor Academy 12e

- **PRICE** £659
- **DESCRIPTION** Grand Concert-sized electro-acoustic six-string guitar, made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Solid sitka spruce top with laminated sapele back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony bridge and fingerboard, Lexan peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, chrome die-cast tuners, Tusq nut and Micarta saddle
- **ELECTRICS** ES-B pickup system
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, no extra charge
- **FINISH** Satin body and neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 631.52 mm/24 7/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 20mm at first fret, 21mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.84kg/4.05lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Deep and defined bass
+ Slim, easy-playing neck
+ Proper all-rounder
+ Pleasing harmonic overtones

– Sounds better acoustically
– No cutaway option

An entry-level, all-round acoustic that provides high-end acoustic tone but sounds a bit thinner when plugged in

8/10

TAYLOR MADE

G&B heads into Mexico to see the state-of-the-art factory in which Taylor's affordable new Academy Series models are manufactured

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** Photography **Eleanor Jane**

When we were first approached about a trip down to San Diego and Mexico after the NAMM Show in January, it sounded like the ideal way to get a little more winter sun before heading back to a wet and miserable UK. Little did we know that the long Californian drought would end in such spectacular style and that the weekend of Winter NAMM – usually blessed with cloudless skies and t-shirt weather – would coincide with more rainfall across Southern California in two days than the state saw in the whole of 2015.

Needless to say, our road trip to Taylor Guitars HQ in El Cajon, near San Diego, and then to the company's Mexican factory just over the border in Tecate, wasn't the sun-bleached expedition of Hollywood cliche, and we were forced to swap our sunglasses for raincoats.

However, the weather couldn't dampen our positive impression of the huge Taylor facility in Tecate which, in keeping with the company's signature blend of mass production and a keen social and environmental conscience, is as clean and spacious a guitar factory as you are ever likely to see, with excellent dust extraction.

Work flows between both Taylor factories in the US and Mexico, but the demarcation line tends to be that the instruments with solid backs and sides are made in El Cajon and the laminates in Tecate. With Taylor's master luthier showing us around the building, we get to see the production of the company's new Academy Series instruments from start to finish, including their innovative armrest.

In the corresponding area inside the Academy Series guitars, instead of lining, a larger piece of mahogany is used, which when machined away, acts as both lining and armrest. Although it looks at first glance like two pieces of mahogany, it's machined from

a single piece (left over from the neck-making process) that's stepped to reduce weight. In keeping with the ethos of these guitars, redundant material and ornamentation have been stripped away.

The cutter rotates at around 12,000 RPM, moving slowly for a clean cut, and the clever design allows for a process that takes four hours on the company's higher-end instruments to be automated – and take just a couple of minutes as a result. The end result is not only functional and comfortable, but reveals its component parts and structure in an elegant, understated manner, much like an Eames chair.

FAIRBANKS F20-S NICK LUCAS GOLD SPARKLE £5,750

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Fairbanks F20-S Nick Lucas Gold Sparkle

The Nick Lucas model was Gibson's first signature guitar. Originals are highly sought after, so top-quality replicas offer a slightly more affordable option. **HUW PRICE** goes after a gold rush

The early-1960s folk boom can be said to have kickstarted vintage guitar culture, as cash-strapped Llewyn Davis types consoled themselves with the notion that the old acoustics they could afford sounded better than the new ones they couldn't. Vintage Martins and Gibsons soon became highly sought after and highly priced, and the rest is history.

Although often underrated as a guitar player, Bob Dylan always had pretty fine taste in acoustics, and by 1963 he was playing a modified and refinished Gibson Nick Lucas Special from the 1930s. It was the first artist signature model offered by Gibson, but the specs were spectacularly inconsistent.

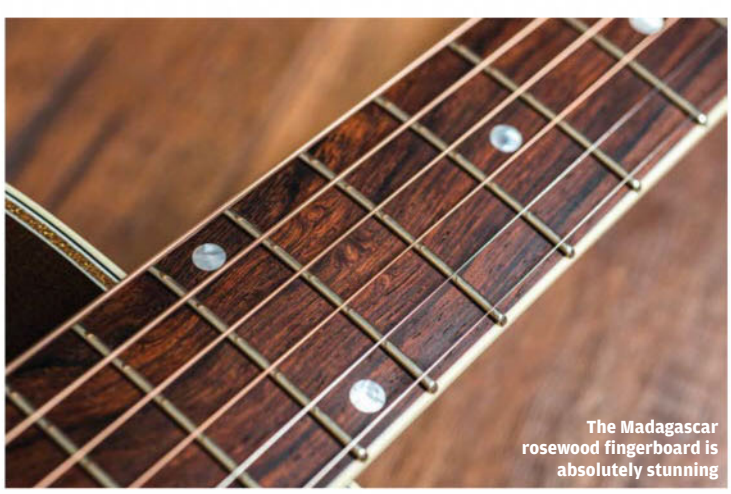
At various times, bodies were made from rosewood, mahogany and maple, with the shape and dimensions changing. Bridge styles varied and some even shipped with a trapeze tailpiece. What's more, neck joins were made at the 12th, 14th and even the 13th fret. Dylan's was a 13-fretter, and it's the one with the Fleur-de-lis headstock inlay seen in countless mid-60s photos.

Dale Fairbanks is a rising star in the American acoustic-building community. Working from his home workshop in West Hartford, Connecticut, he specialises in recreations of classic Gibson acoustics. For his F20 model, he has chosen to replicate a 1930s Nick Lucas, with the later small but deep body style and a 12th-fret neck join.

This reviewer must confess to spending the first few minutes of the review process with his nose stuck in the soundhole, breathing in the heady aromas of timber and wood glue. Admittedly, smell has little or no bearing on tone or playability, but with tonewoods such as this it's very much part of the pleasure.

This intimate encounter with the F20's body parts also reveals the extraordinarily high standard of the build. There is no glue squeeze-out whatsoever and, for the most part, the inside surfaces are smooth enough for spraying. >

All the materials are top-spec, and an intimate encounter with the F20 reveals an extraordinarily high standard of build

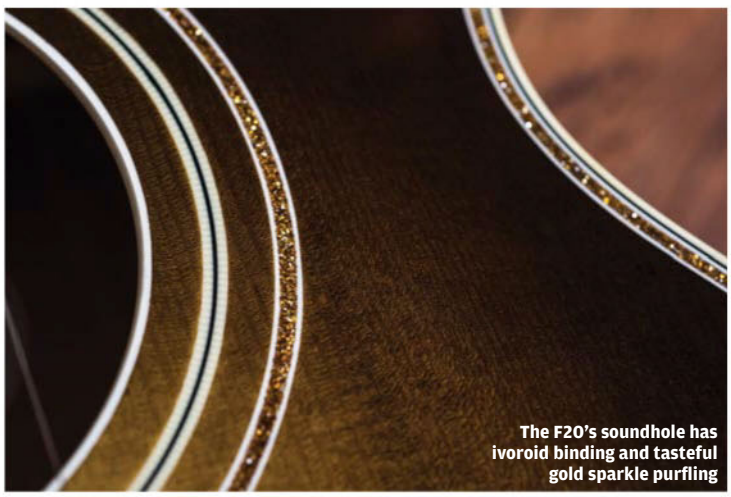


The Madagascar rosewood fingerboard is absolutely stunning

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £5,750
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic guitar, made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid red spruce top with Honduran mahogany back, sides and neck, Madagascar rosewood bridge and fingerboard, ivoroid binding, gold sparkle purfling, unbleached bone nut and saddle, bone bridge pins, ebony peghead overlay, 12th-fret body join
- **HARDWARE** Waverly open-gear tuners
- **ELECTRICS** None
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Nitrocellulose over shellac
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628.65mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 22.5mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 58mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.94kg/4.27lbs
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597
  fairbanksguitars.com
  thenorthamericanguitar.com

Waverly open-gear tuners and an unbleached bone nut add to the luxurious feel


The F20's soundhole has ivoroid binding and tasteful gold sparkle purfling

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Flammang L35-13 Fret** **$5,495** features the same woods and tuners as the F20, but has a 13th-fret neck join. Gibson's own **Nick Lucas Mystic Rosewood Limited Edition** **£2,299** features a figured rosewood body with a sitka spruce top and an LR Baggs Element VTC pickup. **McAlister Guitars' Lucas** **from $7,200** is available with all three neck-joint options.

The back braces are the most delicate we have ever seen. All four are barely a quarter of an inch wide, and they're carved tall and thin, tapering gracefully to a depth of around 1/16" as they tuck under the kerfing. The upshot is that the back is exceptionally resonant, and it responds much like a drum skin when you tap it.

With an inspection mirror, we can see that the top braces are also carved with great finesse and the intersection of the X-braces is the neatest we have ever encountered. In authentic vintage Gibson style, the X-braces are non-scalloped and the bridge plate is maple.

The F20 combines a genuine taste of antique Gibson tone with robust refinement and impressive balance

All the materials are top-spec, with a red spruce top and Honduras mahogany back and sides. The Madagascar rosewood fingerboard and bridge look fabulous and the timber is enhanced by a nitrocellulose-over-shellac finish. The sunburst actually looks as though it might have been hand-applied rather than sprayed – just as Gibson did it back in the day.

It's not resolutely old-school, because Fairbanks has incorporated a two-way truss rod into the neck, and its profile is described as 'modern C'. It's a pretty subjective term used to describe a neck that has noticeably less depth than 20s or 30s necks, yet retains a full roundness that feels more like something from the 50s. So let's call it a 'mid-century modern C' profile and leave it at that.

Other luxury appointments include the unbleached bone nut and saddle and a set of ivoroid-button Waverly tuners. There's more ivoroid binding on the body, fingerboard and soundhole, along with mellow gold sparkle purfling that is as attractive as it is unexpected.

In use

Given the obvious influences behind the F20, the unavoidable question must be whether or not it sounds like a pre-war Gibson acoustic. Based on our recent experiences with the real thing, we would say yes and no.

The most noticeable difference is that the F20 doesn't have the same parched dryness in tone or the hair-trigger response – simply because it's not over 80 years old. What it does have is a very rich harmonic content to complement the warm sparkle and very long sustain. Similarly, the bass weight belies the body size, and a firm playing touch can generate notes with real thump, snap and power. It's also remarkably devoid of midrange boxiness for a guitar of its size.

Measuring just 14¾" across the body, you might assume the F20 is a hardcore fingerpicking guitar, but the four-inch deep body contains enough air to power rhythm parts with equal aplomb. It responds really well to a firm attack, and this is another area in which the F20 differs from vintage examples that barely need to be breathed on to generate fine tone.

Overall, the sound is majestic and genteel, but some may feel it lacks a certain raw-throated excitement. The F20 is, however, a very easy guitar to play in standard as well as open tunings, and excels with the bottleneck. The bass end remains commendably defined and the plain strings are never overpowered.

This far down the line, we can merely speculate on what a brand new Gibson Nick Lucas must have sounded like during the 1930s, but it's reasonable to assume the Fairbanks F20 is there or thereabouts. However, if you are hoping for a guitar that will sweep you back in time with a single strum, you may be better off trying to find a vintage example.

To be clear, that is not intended as a criticism of the F20, which will never confine you to the vintage small-box guitar genre. This guitar combines a genuine taste of antique Gibson tone with robust refinement and impressive balance, but an absence of quirkiness. To enhance this vintage flavour, we would be inclined to ditch the coated phosphor bronze strings and experiment with a set of uncoated round cores – or perhaps a set of monels – instead.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Superb build quality
+ Big and majestic tone
+ Very impressive bass response
+ Fine playability

- Needs an assertive playing touch
- Lacks vintage response and tonal dryness

The Fairbanks F20 combines many vintage Gibson characteristics with flawless playability and impressive volume and balance

8/10

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Stone Deaf Tremotron

What do you get if you cross two shape-shifting analogue tremolo circuits with one fiendish digital brain? Something quite remarkable, says **RICHARD PURVIS**...

Someone at Stone Deaf was sitting on the dock of the bay, watching the tide of the Rochdale Canal roll away, when a thought appeared. 'We make wild analogue pedals, and we make valve amps with clever digital controls,' went the thought. 'Why not make wild analogue pedals with clever digital controls?'. The thought was a good one, and it brought us here today – to the Tremotron.

Like all Stone Deaf pedals, this has a purely analogue signal path, but the addition of digital control has opened up all sorts of sonic options – most notably, the ability to have two completely different VCA-based tremolo effects going on at once, synchronised perfectly at the ratio of your choice. You also get total control over wave shapes (there are nine to choose from, plus six 'half and half' settings), switchable presets and the option of changing multiple parameters simultaneously with an expression pedal. There's MIDI stuff too, but we can feel our brains beginning to panic already – let's get playing.

Like all Stone Deaf pedals, this has a purely analogue signal path, but digital control opens up all sorts of options

In use

So, how can a box with five knobs and one button do all that? The secret of the Tremotron's user interface is in the LEDs, which show one circuit's settings in green and the other's in red. To switch, you just give the knob in question a firm press. It is potentially confusing, but you should get the hang of it soon enough – and the four main presets, accessed by pressing both footswitches at once, are always there to pull you out of the swamp.

We'd best be sensible, at least for a minute, and turn the second circuit to zero depth so we can check out the first one as a conventional single tremolo. Well, maybe 'conventional' isn't quite the word – the shape control covers

KEY FEATURES

Stone Deaf Tremotron

- **PRICE** £208
- **DESCRIPTION** Digitally controlled dual-analogue VCA tremolo pedal, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Tone, level, depth, rate, shape, tempo division button; bypass and tap tempo footswitches
- **FEATURES** Expression pedal input (multi-function), five-pin MIDI input for presets (up to 128); true bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply with 250mA current (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 131x86x61mm
- **CONTACT** Stone Deaf Effects & Amplification 01706 882486 **www.stonedeaffx.com**

The rate control governs the speed of each tremolo. It can be assigned to an expression pedal

Press bypass and tap at the same time to scroll through the four onboard preset slots. You can also recall up to 128 MIDI-controlled presets using a standard MIDI controller

The expression input allows you to connect a standard expression pedal and assign it to rate, depth or shape

The note division button enables you to scroll between crotchets, semi-quavers, triplets and 16th notes. Holding it down saves to a preset

every conceivable variant of rounded, triangular and square waves, and allows you to dial in trem effects as smooth, jerky, stabby or woozy as you like. They all sound bang-on, and the volume control can give a considerable boost to level up the more gappy wave shapes.

Now, you'd best remove any easily startled pets from the house before bringing in the second circuit. It's easy to land on something spectacularly ugly with both effects set fast – there are many flavours of ring modulation available here – but with some judicious tweaking the Tremotron begins to show its real power. You can imagine the wild, disorientating soundscapes that a pair of synchronised tremolos on different waveshapes will throw up, especially when placed after a high-gain fuzzbox... Well, we hope you can, because it's chuffin' impossible to describe them in words. But try this: one trem producing a slow pulse, the other set super-fast but shallow to create a grainy texture that's reminiscent of an old analogue synth.

You can imagine the wild soundscapes that a pair of synchronised tremolos on different waveshapes will throw up

Adding an expression pedal only multiplies the possibilities – spinning in and out of ring modulation can sound ridiculously cool – and there's one more secret weapon to unsheath: the tone control. Turn it down from fully open and you're engaging a powerful low-pass filter that, as long as you have a spare hand to manipulate, makes things even more synth-like.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Stone Deaf Tremotron

The **Electro-Harmonix Super Pulsar** **£201** offers extensive tremolo sound-sculpting in stereo, while the **Pigtronix Tremvelope** **£299** lets your playing dynamics control the speed and depth of the effect. For another unconventional approach to tremolo, try the percussive **ThorpyFX Chain Home** **£199**.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Goes way, way beyond normal tremolo effects...
+ ...but can do those too, in a wide variety of shapes
+ Tone control adds synth-like filtering
- Can get pretty unmusical until you get the hang of it
- You'll need a 250mA power supply

An absolute beast of a pedal that's not easy to keep on the leash, but sounds like nothing else out there

9/10

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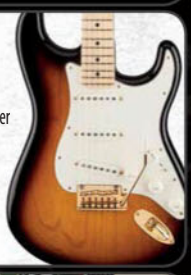

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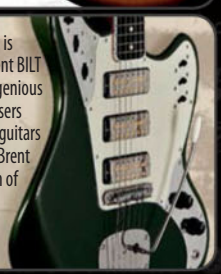

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Keeley Engineering Super Phat Mod & Hooke Reverb

Modder-turned-maker Robert Keeley expands his pedal empire with a transparent overdrive and a multi-mode reverb. **RICHARD PURVIS** checks out a dynamic duo...

You might well argue that, in order to create the perfect rhubarb crumble, your best starting point is to tinker about with other people's rhubarb crumbles and find ways to make them better. This is a career path that can work just as well in the world of guitar effects as it does in the kitchen, and there's no better proof of that than Robert Keeley.

After studying electrical engineering, this Oklahoma native made his name by modding Boss and Ibanez overdrives, before creating a stompbox compressor that became a modern classic. Now there are more than 30 products in the Keeley line, and here are two of the newest additions: an overdrive based on his old 'Phat' modification of the Boss BD-2, and a six-mode digital reverb. Mmm, crumble...

Super Phat Mod

The most obvious difference between this and the original Phat Mod is that it isn't a Boss Blues Driver. It's certainly based on the modified BD-2 that played a big part in the growth of Keeley's reputation, but this isn't just the same circuit in a non-Boss enclosure. We're told the 'magic' Toshiba JFET that drives this gold box took years to discover, allowing Keeley to design a new overdrive with the same amp-like dynamics. It's a compact pedal with a sparkly gold finish, and it's going to look a lot more classy on your pedalboard than a Boss with a blue LED and an extra switch. Having said that, it does have both of those things – the switch allowing you to toggle between 'flat' and 'phat' depending on your lower-frequency needs. Other than that, it's a familiar layout with self-explanatory controls for level, tone and drive.

It's a slap around the chops for the front end of our amp, with maybe just a dash of added Tube Screamer snarl

In use

This isn't one of those overdrives that sound even better when they're not overdriving, but it can do something not

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Super Phat Mod

It you want truly transparent overdrive, your search begins – and probably ends – with the **Paul Cochrane Timmy £129**. For fans of the Blues Driver who want a little more refinement, other options include the **Analog Man BD-2/Super £145** and **Boss**'s own **Waza Craft** version, the **BD-2W £135**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Hooke Reverb

In February's issue we tested three of the world's finest reverb pedals: the **Empress Reverb £459**, **Strymon BigSky £479** and **Eventide Space £490**. **Mr Black**'s **Deluxe Plus £139** is Twin Peaks in a box, while **Strymon**'s **Flint £299** is the one-stop reverb and tremolo kingpin.

far off a clean boost – at least with medium or low-output pickups. In flat mode with the drive fully off and the other two controls at noon you get a nice, subtle crunching up with a bit of added zing in the top. Wind the tone down and the treble response is softened, but not at the expense of any musicality. And when we crank the level? It's a slap around the chops for the front end of our amp, with maybe just a dash of added Tube Screamer snarl sharpening up the mids. The toppy transients are even more zingy now – with single coils you might want to keep that tone control low.

Dialling up the drive brings more sweet grittiness up to about 10 o'clock, and then we slip quite quickly into full-on rock-spank territory. It's tight and feisty and a little thinned out in the bottom, but the texture of the distortion remains smooth – this could easily be mistaken for the high-gain channel your amplifier forgot to tell you it had. Touch-sensitivity is excellent, and it cleans up almost completely with the guitar volume wound back to about 7.

'looseness' and output level. Peer closer, though, and the tiny markings on the left-hand side reveal that those two controls have different functions depending on which mode is selected. Then peer even closer than that – once you've unscrewed the bottom panel – and you'll see two internal switches: one for vintage or modern tone, one for selecting a bank of three different reverbs.

We all love a tinker, but it's a shame that half of the six sounds on offer are inaccessible without a screwdriver. Let's find out if the quality of the Hooke's sounds of the Hooke will overcome any reservations about its layout.

In use

We know our alphabet even better than we know obscure principles of physics, so we'll start with bank A... but we might not stay there too long, because as it turns out most of the really inspiring stuff in this pedal is on the other side of that internal switch.

The spring reverb is admirably

Many of our favourite dusty combos have a really sweet tremolo effect, and that's also on the menu here

Switching to phat mode puts back some of the bottom end in a way that will be hugely welcome in some situations, though not in others – but that's why it's so great to have the option: if your open chords are getting swamped, flick it back to flat and they'll slim out nicely. There's nothing about this box that hasn't been judged cannily.

Hooke Reverb

What's with the name? Well, as every schoolboy doesn't know, in physics Hooke's Law concerns the forces acting on springs... and the spring reverbs found in vintage Fender amps are this digital unit's inspiration. What many of our favourite dusty combos also have is a really sweet tremolo effect, and that's also on the menu here – along with a Magnatone-style pitch vibrato and one or two distinctly non-vintage tricks.

The controls look simple enough at first, with a three-way mode switch surrounded by knobs for adjusting reverb length and tone, plus spring close to the real thing, with plenty of rhythmic judder – maybe too much for some tastes – while the controls allow ample fine-tuning of colour and density. The level knob even offers a substantial boost to the dry signal, but we wouldn't overdo this – like many digital reverb units, even at unity gain this pedal adds a bit of hiss.

Fugue mode plunges us into a wash of ambient octaves – one up and one down – whose levels can be adjusted by the two left-hand controls. There's no dry signal at all in this mode. It's wacky alright, though we're not sure how often we'd use it.

The third mode, a combination of reverb and tremolo, is a taste of the goodies we're about to come to on the other half of this pedal – it's warm, natural and just about irresistible. What could be better? Well, here's one thing: the bolder, longer-decaying version of the same effect that's found in bank B. The tremolo here is just as pleasing, but the bigger reverb has far more scope for deep atmospherics. The spring/plate blend is also an improvement on the spring on its own – smoother and more immersive – while the super-sweet vibrato/verb is probably the most addictive effect here. Best of all, both tremolo and vibrato effects can be enjoyed completely dry by turning the reverb control to zero. That's multi-FX, that is.

KEY FEATURES

Keeley Super Phat Mod

- **PRICE** £149
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Level, tone, drive; flat/phat switch
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 111x67x48mm
- **CONTACT** Keeley Engineering **robertkeeley.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Nice sparkly crunch with gain at minimum
+ Powerful, natural-sounding overdrive when pushed
+ Tone control better than most
- Is it distinctive enough to win new Keeley converts?

A smooth yet snappy overdrive that sounds totally convincing all the way through its gain range

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Keeley Hooke Reverb

- **PRICE** £179
- **DESCRIPTION** Multi-mode reverb pedal with tremolo, vibrato and more, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Reverb and output level, plus 'tone' and 'spring' controls with different functions depending on mode; three-way mode switch; internal switches for vintage/modern tone and mode bank A/B
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 111x67x52mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Rich and immersive spring/plate reverb
+ Added tremolo and vibrato are a brilliant bonus
- It can get hissy
- External mode switching functionality would be useful

A compact reverb unit that has some luscious sounds but can be fiddly to get the best out of

7/10

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Fender American Professional Jazz Bass & Precision Bass

You've met the guitars, now meet the new Standard for bassists as **GARETH MORGAN** checks out Fender's 2017 American Pro Series...

In times past, the words 'upgrade' and 'Fender' in the same sentence could give some cause for concern. Bassists and guitarists who love their Fenders don't necessarily want the objects of their affection messed with. We love the way they look and sound. Thankfully, recent times have shown Fender is determined to preserve the aesthetic, with upgrades confined to hardware, electronics and invisibles such as truss rods. When Fender announced the American Standard Series, first seen in 1987, was to be superseded by the American Professional Series, we at *Guitar & Bass* had high expectations.

Jazz Bass

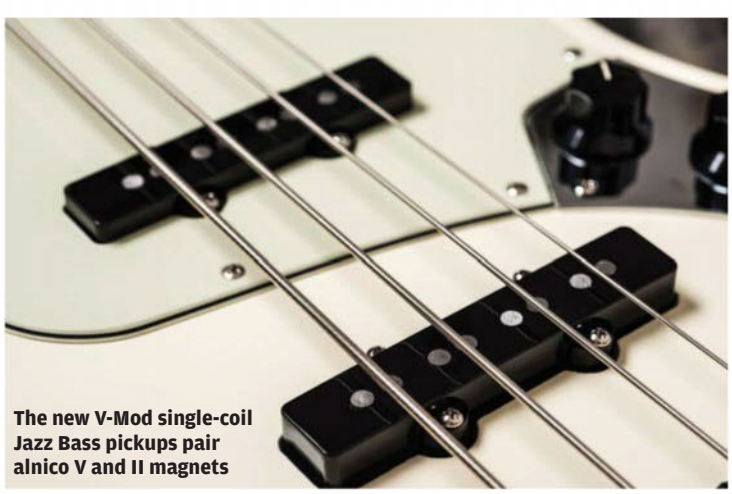
Our review Jazz Bass comes with its sexily offset, twin-cutaway alder body enveloped in a classy Olympic White finish with a three-ply Mint Green pickguard. Playing comfort is catered for by a forearm chamfer on the upper-rear bout and a ribcage offering on the flip side at the waist. It's all reassuringly familiar and the standard of workmanship and finishing is excellent.

The maple neck is kitted out with Posiflex graphite support rods for greater stability, the slim C profile feels ultra-comfortable in the hand and is an enticing prospect. As well as white dot position markers, the rosewood fingerboard carries 20 nickel frets in the new narrow tall configuration which, says Fender, is "especially effective for bending notes and playing chords up the neck with perfect intonation". Fender rings the changes with the tuners, a set of four Fender Lightweight Vintage-Style units along the top edge of the headstock. These have a fluted shaft, which forces windings downwards, keeps them tight and helps promote a sharper and more consistent break angle over the nut for better tuning stability and more sustain.

Fender has fitted the HiMass Vintage bridge utilised on American Standard models, with top-load or string-thru capability and just a little more substance than the regular ones. The strings are guided onto the fingerboard at the headstock by a bone nut, which ups the vintage credentials, promotes a balanced tone and will last for ages.

Electronics are traditionally passive, but the pickups are a pair of new V-Mod single-coil Jazz Bass units. They're a modification of the previous vintage design, utilising alnico V magnets on the treble side and alnico II magnets on the bass side for vintage warmth married to crisp clarity. The controls number two volumes and a master tone.

Sounds

As well as being a real joy to play, the AP Jazz exudes all of the familiar tonal qualities – enhanced by the new V-Mod single coils – and first impressions of the new fret configuration suggest a fraction less extraneous noise. Twin-pickup mode with the tone flat-out has the Jazz bursting with colourful harmonics, which help imbue the E string's pleasing thud with an aggressive growl. The midrange is well balanced and exudes decent punch, and highs are clean and crisp without being overly zingy or brittle sounding. Chopping back the tone softens note edges so, whilst still punchy, they're a little more polite, although too close >

The new V-Mod single-coil Jazz Bass pickups pair alnico V and II magnets

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

American Pro Jazz Bass

The **D Lakin Rick Rossa £1,399** is a traditional, passive rendering of the J Bass template. **Sandberg**'s **California II TT from £1,325** is an active, hand-built take on the vibe and a joy to play.

For a more affordable option, check out the **Squier Vintage Modified Jazz Bass £310** – it plays beautifully and has Fender-designed pickups.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

American Pro Precision Bass

If you want to push the boat out, try the **Xotic XP-1T £2,450**. It's got a three-band EQ with Xotic's own preamp and is simply top-notch. Sandberg also offers the **California II VS from £1,100**. Hand-built with a single split coil and 22 frets, it's rather good. Try also the **Bass Collection Power Bass £325**, an excellent, inexpensive rendition of the P Bass vibe.

to full cut it's, as always, woolly and indistinct. With the neck pickup, it's a raspier, earthier affair with P Bass leanings – you still get lively, growling lows but there's fractionally less body to the midrange and the highs are less open. The bridge pickup exudes the usual burpy tone with a slight nasal edge and plenty of snappy definition; there's enough bottom end to make it practical without recourse to your amp's EQ.

maple neck is kitted out with Posiflex graphite rods, and utilises the '63 P Bass profile, which Fender says with some justification is "considered by many to be the gold standard of bass neck profiles". It's ultra-comfortable in the playability stakes, but not quite as slim and fast as the Jazz, which is a standard element in the build DNA of the P Bass. The neck is similarly capped with a rosewood fingerboard bearing standard white dot markers and 20 narrow tall nickel frets. As well as better intonation, thinner fretting points produce cleaner notes, less encumbered by extraneous clicks and squeaks. The tuners are Lightweight Vintage-Style and the bridge is a HiMass Vintage unit with top load or string-thru capability. To complete the set, the delineation between fingerboard and headstock is also a bone nut.

As well as passive electronics, the P Bass features a newly designed pickup, namely a V-Mod Split single-coil humbucker with the same mix of alnico V and alnico II magnets. As ever, the controls are simply one volume and one tone.

Sounds

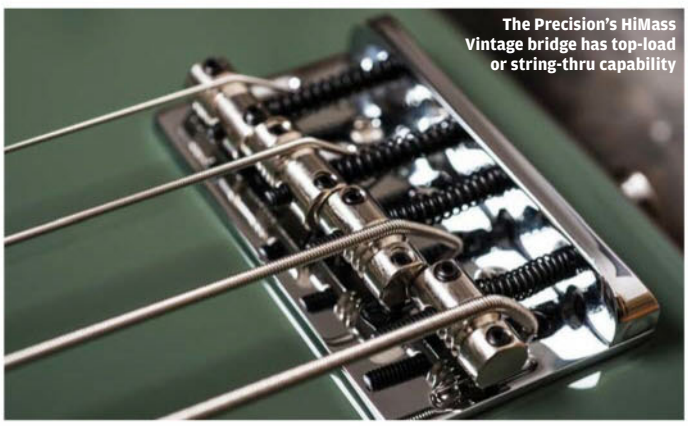
This is, quite simply, a really good-sounding P Bass. Wind up the tone and the reward is a fat bottom end with pleasing growl, combining aggressive intent with harmonics-laden clarity. The midrange errs on the darker side, which induces a raspy punch with plenty of stature. The highs, whilst plenty well-realised with excellent clarity, are nowhere near as explosive as those produced by the Jazz, and feel a bit compressed if you lay into the D and G strings. Be reassured, though, that the thinner strings have plenty of body and are practical for melodic groove playing. Backing off the tone induces more thud-oriented results, blurring note edges a fraction and creating a tone that sounds progressively more controlled. It's a great take on a winning formula.

This is a really good-sounding P Bass. Wind up the tone and the reward is a fat bottom end with a pleasing growl

American Pro Precision Bass

Introduced in 1951, the P Bass preceded its Jazzy sister by nine years. The new American Pro version looks just as businesslike as it ever did with its even oval rear bouts, forearm (and ribcage) chamfers, slim waist and offset dorsal fin horns. The new and rather sumptuous Antique Olive finish is a welcome addition to Fender's colour library and adds depth to the classic vista.

The P Bass also has the same three-ply Mint Green pickguard, albeit in more expansive form. Its


The Precision's HiMass Vintage bridge has top-load or string-thru capability

KEY FEATURES

American Pro Jazz Bass

- **PRICE** £1,509 inc hardcase
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody bass. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 20 narrow tall nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard (maple an option). Fender Lightweight Vintage-Style tuners and 4-Saddle HiMass Vintage bridge, chrome hardware
- **ELECTRICS** Passive with 2x V-Mod single-coil Jazz Bass pickups.
- **CONTROLS** 2x volume, 1x master tone
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, £1,569
- **FINISHES** Olympic White, 3-Colour Sunburst, Black, Sonic Grey
- **SCALE LENGTH** 864mm/34"
- **NECK WIDTH** 39mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 10.5mm at nut, 19mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.1kg/9.04lbs
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA, 01342 331748 www.fender.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Classic looks that improve with age
+ Plays like a dream and sounds the business
+ Good, practical developments... especially the pickups

– Upgrades come at a price

Quite simply a top-notch Jazz Bass that exudes class from every pore and sounds just as good as it always did

9/10

KEY FEATURES

American Pro Precision Bass

- **PRICE** £1,509 inc hardcase
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody bass. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 20 narrow tall nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard (maple an option). Fender Lightweight Vintage-Style tuners and 4-Saddle HiMass string thru or top-load bridge, chrome hardware
- **ELECTRICS** Passive with 1x Fender V-Mod Split single-coil pickup
- **CONTROLS** 1x volume, 1x master tone
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, £1,569
- **FINISHES** Antique Olive, Olympic White, 3-Colour Sunburst, Black
- **SCALE LENGTH** 864mm/34"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 57mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at 1st fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 11.5mm at nut, 19mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.9kg/8.6lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A really playable P Bass
+ The V-Mod split-coil pickup is more tonally open
+ Looks as cool as it ever did

– As with the Jazz, a little pricey

A solid Precision Bass that's ultra-comfortable to play and does all of the rock 'n' roll jobs you expect it to with aplomb

9/10

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TONY BACON

Tony Bacon is an author and journalist who writes about musical instruments, musicians, and music. More info at tonybacon.co.uk. His books include *The Ultimate Guitar Book*, *The Gibson 335 Guitar Book*, and *The Ibanez Electric Guitar Book*, and his latest is *The Bass Book* (Backbeat), which tells the story of the electric bass guitar.

SWING TO THE LEFT

A southpaw himself, TONY BACON examines the contentious issue: do left-handers naturally make better guitar players?

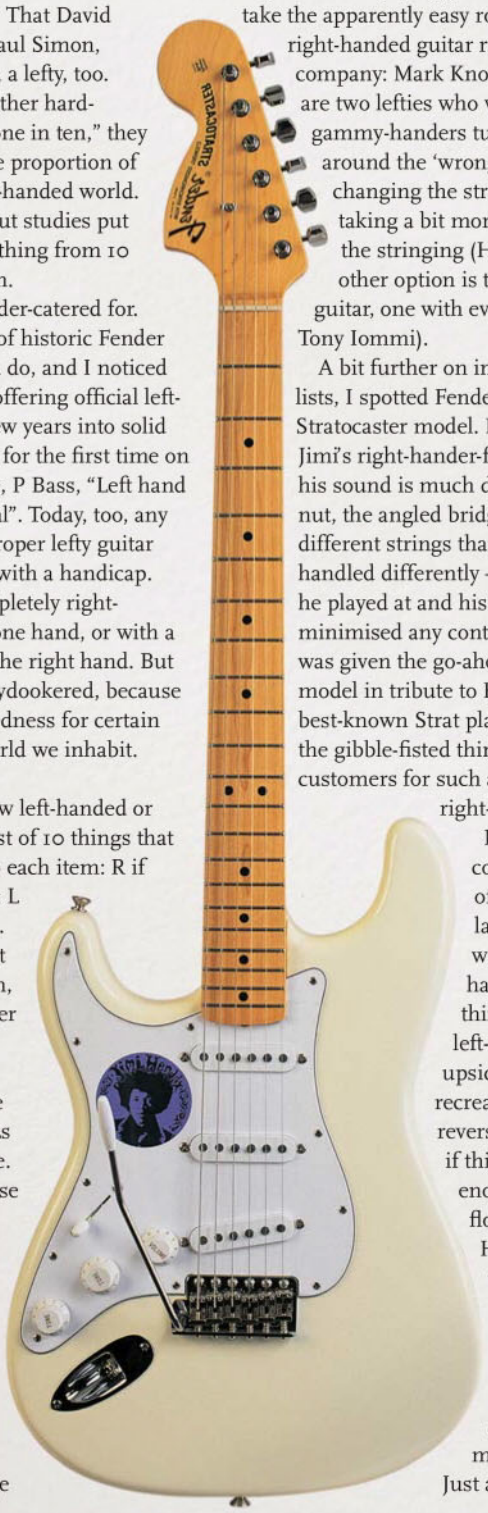
When is a left-hander not a left-hander? When he's Jimi Hendrix in the mirror. There are plenty of left-handed musicians. Can you name some? That David Bowie, he was one. Paul Simon, Kurt Cobain, Ollie Halsall. I'm a lefty, too.

UB40 had a song about another hard-pressed minority – "I am the one in ten," they sang – roughly the same as the proportion of left-handers living in the right-handed world. No one has absolute figures, but studies put the proportion of lefties at anything from 10 to 25 per cent of the population.

Lefties have always been under-catered for. I was leafing through my pile of historic Fender price lists the other day, as you do, and I noticed that they didn't get around to offering official left-handed options until a good few years into solid electric production. There it is for the first time on the '59 list: Strat, Tele, Esquire, P Bass, "Left hand models – 10 per cent additional". Today, too, any cuddy-wifter searching for a proper lefty guitar might still feel he's labouring with a handicap.

Most right-handers are completely right-handed: any job they do with one hand, or with a dominant hand, they do with the right hand. But few left-handers are fully mollydookered, because they're forced into right-handedness for certain things in this right-handed world we inhabit. Using scissors, say.

Here's a quick test to tell how left-handed or right-handed you are. In the list of 10 things that follows, write an R or L next to each item: R if you do it with your right hand; L if you do it with your left hand. Writing, using a knife (without a fork), drawing, using a spoon, throwing, using a broom (upper hand), using scissors, striking a match (the match), using a toothbrush, opening a box (the lid). Done it? The number of Ls or Rs provides your percentage. I'm a typical left-hander because I marked some of the 10 L and some R. I scored six Ls, making me 60 per cent left-handed. Almost every right-hander will score 10 Rs: 100 per cent right-handed. Ambidexterity is useful! Southpaws, with their better capability to use both hands equally, thus have an advantage when it comes to playing most instruments. Cack-handers deal with their 'affliction' in different ways when they play guitar. Some, me included, take the apparently easy route and play a regular right-handed guitar right-handed. I'm in good company: Mark Knopfler and Robert Fripp are two lefties who went rightwards. Other gammy-handers turn a right-handed guitar around the 'wrong' way, either without changing the strings (Albert King, say) or taking a bit more trouble and reversing the stringing (Hendrix, for example). The other option is to get a true left-handed guitar, one with everything reverse (like Tony Iommi).



A bit further on in that pile of price lists, I spotted Fender's 1997 Jimi Hendrix Stratocaster model. How much difference Jimi's right-hander-flipped Strat made to his sound is much debated – the reversed nut, the angled bridge pickup accentuating different strings than usual, the vibrato handled differently – but the intense volume he played at and his natural dexterity probably minimised any contrasts. Anyway, Fender was given the go-ahead to make an official model in tribute to Hendrix, arguably the best-known Strat player ever. But what about the gibble-fisted thing, when most potential customers for such a guitar would want a right-handed axe?

Fender decided to make a completely reversed version of one of Jimi's typical late-60s Strats. The result was a guitar that right-handed players needed to think of as a 'regular' left-handed guitar turned upside down and restrung, recreating Jimi's experience in reverse, as it were. Got that? As if this was not befuddling enough, Fender added a final flourish to the '97 Jimi Hendrix Tribute Strat. So that the adoring owner could pose to full effect with the new acquisition in front of the mirror, the headstock logo was applied in reverse. In the mirror, the owner was Jimi. Just add talent.

CHANGING THE DYNAMIC

On tour with Blossoms and the new Shure KSM8

"The KSM8 is a really great transition from the Shure Beta 58's that we've used for some time now. It's very similar audio-wise but when Tom moves his head to the side it doesn't thin out anymore, which is beneficial for the in-ears. I don't need to chop any of the usual 250hz like you usually do and it has a great even tone all the way to the top. There really is very minimal EQing required to make the KSM8 sound nice through any PA."

- Chris Pearce, FOH Engineer

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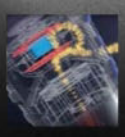

Blossoms, Manchester Academy. Photography: Shirlaine Forrest.

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1961 EPIPHONE CORONET

Epiphone's Coronet underwent a design evolution in the early 1960s, and this transition-era beauty is a stunning example

The early 1960s was a curious period for Epiphone guitars. After acquiring the brand in 1957, Gibson moved production from New York City to Kalamazoo, Michigan, snatched up some remaining parts from its former rival's now defunct factory, and set about launching an entirely new line of instruments.

Up to this point, Epiphone had yet to market any solidbody electrics of its own. But by the end of the decade, Gibson's management developed three new solidbody Epiphone models that stayed in production throughout the 1960s.

At the top of the heap sat the Epiphone Crestwood, which eventually shipped with three Gibson mini-humbuckers, followed by the two-pickup Wilshire, and the single-pickup Coronet on the lowest rung. All three guitars shared the same body shape outfitted with features that evolved between their late-50s launch and the mid-60s.

Today's 1961 Coronet model falls right in the middle of the trio's design evolution. The bodies of early Coronets were of slab construction, not unlike a double-cut Telecaster. By 1960, however, Epiphone solidbodies were being built with a more curved, Stratocaster-like edge chamfer.

The earliest Coronets were also built with leftover New Yorker pickups from the Epiphone factory, but as these stores dwindled, the pickups were replaced by Gibson P-90s with single knobs for tone and volume.

It wasn't until 1963 that the body shape of the Coronet – along with that of the Crestwood and Wilshire – was redesigned in a more comprehensive way. The shared Gibson/Epiphone Kalamazoo factory introduced a new asymmetrical body shape to the series, along with a 'batwing' headstock with all six tuners on the same side.

This particular instrument comes from Guncotton Guitars in London, and is an excellent example of a transition-era Coronet. It's an early enough model to include the original symmetrical profile, but doesn't feature the non-curved edges and weaker pickups of the first years of production. The guitar is in extremely good condition with its original case and only minor play wear, despite its age.

These guitars were built in the same factory, by the same personnel, as contemporary Gibsons and offer the same level of build quality and components. While never as iconic or omnipresent as Les Pauls or SGs, 1960s Epiphone solidbodies such as the Coronet do pop up throughout the annals of rock history. Jimi Hendrix, Pete Townshend and Ace Frehley played Epis early in their careers, with more recent proponents including Jeff Tweedy of Wilco and Captain Kirk Douglas of The Roots.

VITAL STATISTICS

1961 Epiphone Coronet

- **PRICE GUIDE** £1,250-£2,100
- **YEAR** 1961
- **TYPE** Solidbody electric guitar
- **REVERB SELLER** Guncotton Guitars reverb.com/shop/guncotton-guitars
- **SEE MORE** reverb.com/item/4382283-1961-epiphone-coronet-sb-533-cherry-vintage-original

Epiphone Casino
#37361
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CASINO ROYALE

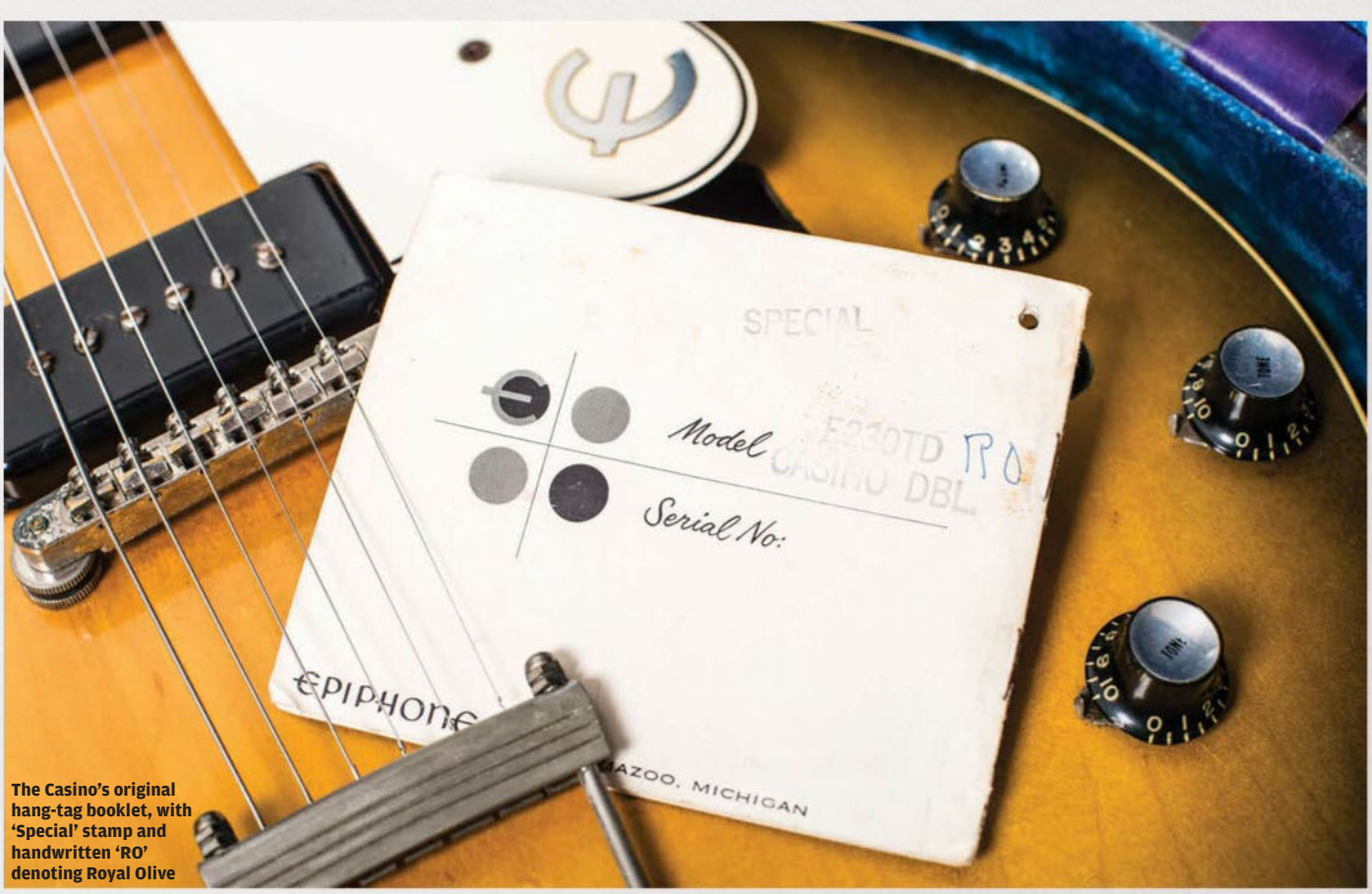
Some of the biggest names in pop history have played Epiphone Casinos, but this is one of the rarest of them all. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** plugs in...

The thinline, hollowbody Epiphone Casino was introduced in 1961, two years after its close cousin, the Gibson ES-330. Though the Casino wouldn't go on to become as big a seller as the ES-330 (production of which peaked at 4,898 in 1967, versus the Casino's 1,814), Epiphone shipping records indicate that in its year of introduction, the company shipped a healthy 110 E230T single-pickup, 176 E230TD twin-pickup and 153 E230TDV twin-pickup models equipped with the company's Tremotone vibrato tailpiece.

Is this the only Royal Olive Casino ever made? It's certainly an extremely rare bird

Our Casino's serial number – 37361 – and trapeze tailpiece suggest that it is one of the 176 E230TD models to leave the Kalamazoo factory in 1961, and its dot fingerboard inlays, black pickup covers and 'short' headstock are also period correct. Single-parallelogram inlays would replace dots in 1962, the black plastic dog-ear P-90 covers were nickel by '63 and the Gibson-like 'open book' headstock outline became thinner and longer in '64.

Though the company's shipping records don't list the colour breakdown for the first year of the Casino's manufacture, the 1961 Epiphone catalogue – in which the Casino resides alongside the shortlived Windsor, positioning what might be the company's worst- and best-known models on the same page – lists the Casino, "dramatic in appearance and tonal qualities, ultra-modern," as being available in Royal >

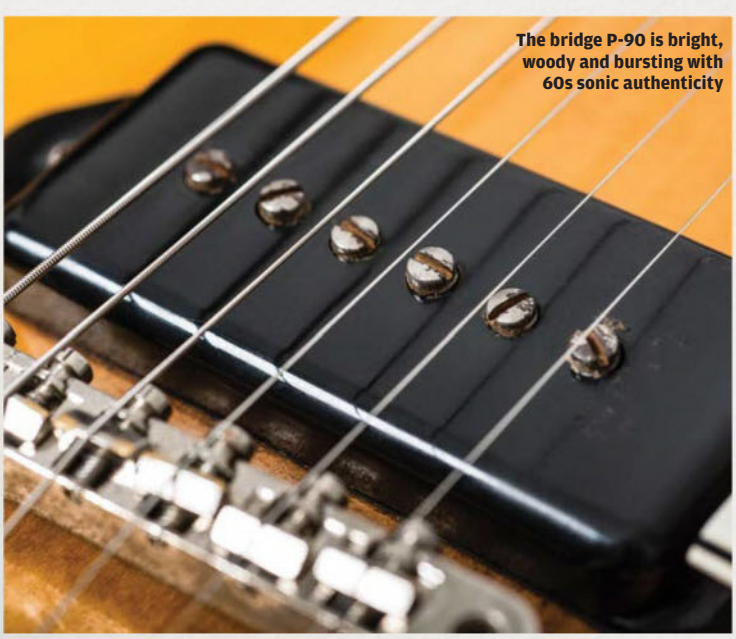


The Casino's original hang-tag booklet, with 'Special' stamp and handwritten 'RO' denoting Royal Olive

The Casino's three-ply scratchplate is original, as is the switch tip

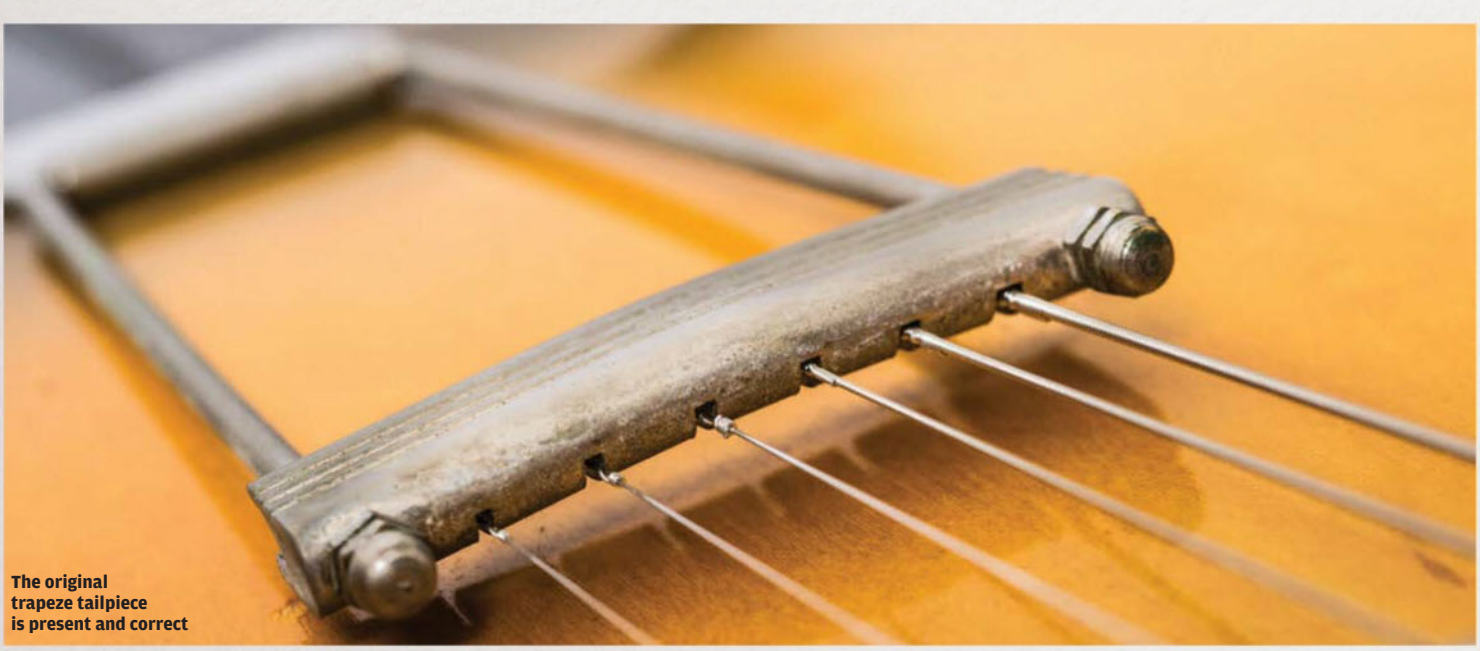
The neck shape feels particularly thin and speedy on many Gibsons and Epiphones of this vintage

175 other Casino E230TD models left Kalamazoo's production line in 1961



The bridge P-90 is bright, woody and bursting with 60s sonic authenticity

Note two thumbwheels on each side of the Tune-o-matic: likely a factory addition designed to alleviate potentially destructive string tension on the posts



The original trapeze tailpiece is present and correct

The green hue in the Royal Olive finish extends to the back, which would have been brown on regular Sunburst models

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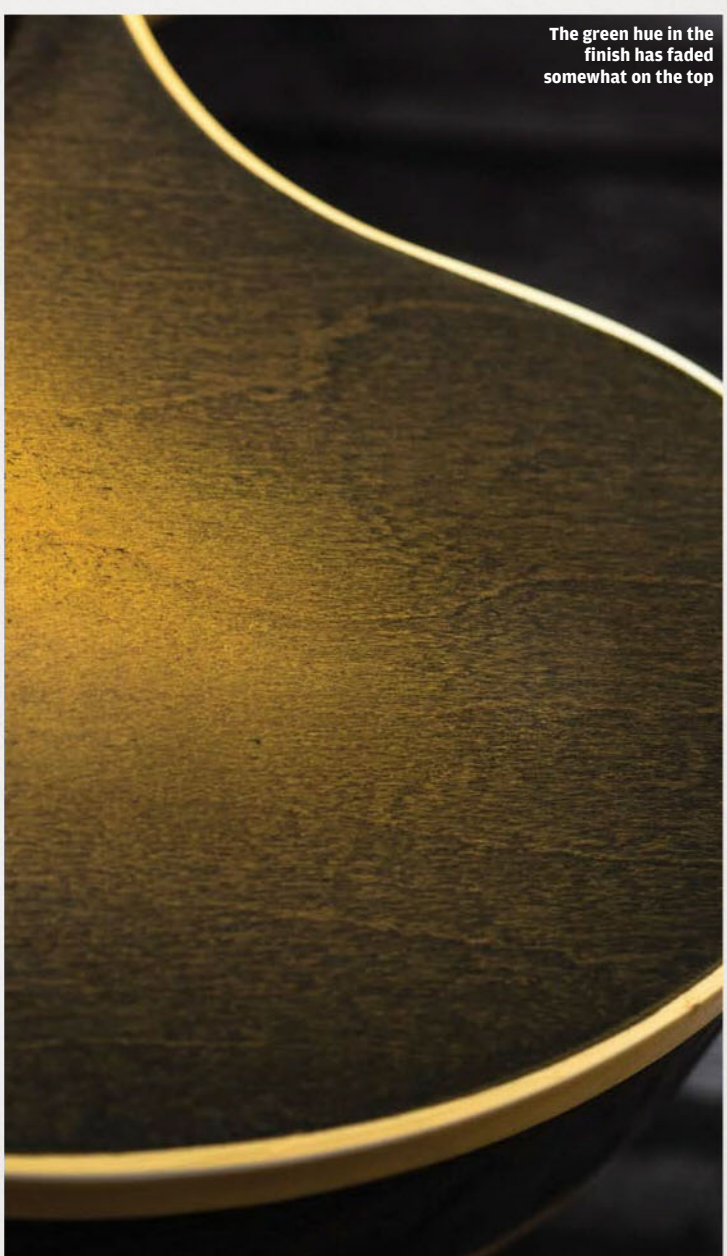
The original Kluson Deluxe tuners still function smoothly



The green hue in the finish has faded somewhat on the top

This headstock outline was superseded by a longer and thinner shape in 1964

KEY FEATURES

1961 Epiphone E230TD Casino

- **PRICE** £7,850
- **DESCRIPTION** Thinline double-cutaway electric with hollow laminated maple/birch body and mahogany neck. Made in Kalamazoo, MI
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/628mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 50.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **WEIGHT** 2.6kg/5.9lbs
- **FINISH** Royal Olive
- **CONTACT** Vintage 'N' Rare Guitars 01225 463777 **www.vintageandrareguitars.com**

Tan or "shaded" (aka Sunburst) finishes. And yet the instrument in front of us is neither sunburst, nor does it have the lighter yellow-orange 'burst of a Royal Tan. As well as its original dark grey, blue-lined hardcase, this Casino comes complete with the original hang-tag booklet, the rear of which is stamped 'special' along with the model name and number, while 'RO' – for Royal Olive – is handwritten.

Royal Olive – a curious yellow-green 'burst with the greenish hue continued around the back where it would usually be brown – was a common-enough finish on the single-cut Sorrento thinline but here, on a Casino, it must have been a special order. Is this the only Royal Olive Casino ever made? It's impossible to say, but it's certainly an extremely rare bird.

Despite carrying out extensive searches for another example, this is the only one that we can find on the whole of the internet, and the only one that the vintage experts we spoke to have heard of. If there are any other Royal Olive Casinos sitting in their cases under beds somewhere, we'd still estimate the total to number only in the single digits.

In use

Regardless of scarcity, this is simply a great hollowbody electric guitar. The first thing that strikes you upon taking it out of the case is the rather slim and flat neck profile, typical of the Kalamazoo factory's output in 1961 when ES-335s and ES-330s gained a new, speedy neck profile, too. That, in combination with the short headstock and lightweight, original Kluson Deluxe tuners means that, despite the fully-hollow body and lack of a vibrato tailpiece, strapped-on balance isn't too neck-heavy. However, like an original ES-330, it's noticeable that these are much lighter and more fragile-feeling instruments than modern reissues. We'd advise reining in those Townshendian influences...

Plugged into a suitably vintage late-50s Fender Vibrolux and a modern Swart AST (itself based on a vintage Gibson circuit), the bridge P-90 proves bright but woody – hard picking down by the Tune-o-matic bridge delivers that twangy early-Stones lead tone with unsurprising yet addictive authenticity, while chiming open-string arpeggios evoke mid-period Beatles with a slightly banjo-like plonkiness that's really evocative of the period. It's pure *Revolver*, even if the actual instruments on that record were a mixed bag.

Winding up the gain delivers creamy lead sounds with real bite when you dig in; it's wonderfully dynamic

Winding up the gain delivers creamy lead sounds with real bite when you dig in; it's wonderfully dynamic. If you can drag yourself away from the bridge pickup, you'll find a beautifully voiced neck pickup that's not too dark, but is nicely smoky for blues-y lead. The middle setting is also really well balanced for 60s rhythm parts and plenty more besides.

Like any vintage hollowbody, controlling feedback can be something of a challenge at stage volume levels, but when you do strike a balance, you are rewarded with musical and moreish feedback and effortless bloom. There's no doubt that an all-original vintage instrument in a rare finish is generally more appealing to the collector than the real-world player, but it would be a shame if this guitar didn't end up in the loving arms of someone who uses it to create music for decades to come. It really is a delight to plug in.

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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

THE BEAT GOES ON

A contemporary curator of budget beat tools, Matt Armstrong has an array of classic amps and period guitars. *G&B* talks Mersey beats and authentic tones with The Kaisers' former rhythm guitarist and the band's long-standing frontman...

Story & photography **Mark Alexander**

Above left **Armstrong's beloved red and gold 1959 Höfner Colorama 162**
Above right **Armstrong has four Colorama models in total**
Top right **The six-in-line headstock of a Höfner Colorama 161 dating from 1961**

A hip coffee bar in the seaside town of North Berwick may be a million miles away from Liverpool's Cavern Club, or indeed the Indra Club in Hamburg, but it's the ideal place to meet up with the unpretentiously dapper Matt Armstrong. The industrial vibe of the Steampunk Café is a happy hunting ground for the 49-year-old, who has been known to spin the house decks on a Sunday afternoon – providing a retrospective soundtrack for the weekend loungers.

But Armstrong's record collection isn't why we have agreed to meet up in this converted warehouse on a sunny afternoon in East Lothian. As the coffee bean roaster whirs and splutters, I make my way up a flight of steps flanked with vintage memorabilia. On the mezzanine floor, I find Armstrong accompanied by the charismatic George Miller, both of whom are quietly supping hot beverages while surrounded by battered guitar cases and vintage amps from the golden era. The bare floorboards and wood-burning stoves provide the perfect backdrop for the impressive assembly, which is drawing admiring glances from the intrigued patrons. If only they knew. "Cheap, cheerful and old is where it's at," says Armstrong, smiling. He's been carefully amassing his collection of vintage guitars and basses ever since he discovered the infectious buzz of Merseybeat during his teenage years.

> *"Because we wanted to set up a beat group, it was natural we wanted the right type of guitars and amps"*

Armstrong became unashamedly infatuated with the origins of the music that would define the decade of his birth and mould his guitar collection. "Blondie's *Heart Of Glass* came out in 1978 and was the first single I bought," he says. "The second was *A Hard Day's Night* after I watched the Beatles cartoons on the TV. I remember being in bed with glandular fever and listening to The Beatles' BBC sessions, which were being played for the first time on radio. I wanted to sound like that."

Armstrong would eventually fulfil his dream when he and Miller formed The Kaisers in 1992, predating their better-known namesakes Kaiser Chiefs by eight years. Far from the swagger of indie, Armstrong's beat band faithfully embodied an era of Brylcreem quiffs and black-polished winkle pickers. The stylised look was more rock than pop and more edgy than polished, but Armstrong had found his sound.

"I couldn't get enough of the early Beatles," he continues. "By 1967, it had gone too weird for me. I didn't have any pals who were into that – there was the mod thing, the two-tone thing and the new romantic thing at school, but I was wearing my little round, crew-neck jumper. I was an island by myself and I existed like that for a long time. But then I bumped into George at a party and that was it – I had found somebody else who knew what was going on!"

By this time, Miller had been in various bands, but had yet to find a genre with which he could truly connect. "I had been in a rockabilly band, but got fed up of it because it didn't feel authentic – I didn't feel qualified to be in a rockabilly band," he admits. "When we started The Kaisers, we kind of had a right to do that because we came from the same place where beat music came from. Beat music was, after all, British people playing American music wrong."

With Armstrong's passion for and Miller's connection with beat music, the pair set about capturing the energy and sound of an era. It was a potent mix that resulted in the band releasing a string of studio albums, including *Squarehead Stomp!*, *Beat It Up!* and *Twist With The Kaisers*. They toured in the US three times and recorded radio sessions with John Peel and Mark Radcliffe. "The Peel sessions felt like we were in a real band," Miller quips.

But simply playing the music from the early 1960s wasn't going to cut it. The Kaisers needed the appropriate tools to achieve that unmistakable raw sound. "Because we wanted to set up a beat group," he continues, "it was natural we wanted to have the right type of guitars and the right amps."

True colours

Armstrong had already gladly taken on responsibility for curating the instruments that had been used to create the distinctive tones of >

Above **Matt Armstrong surrounded by his beloved vintage instruments**

Top left **The Harmony 12-string H79 features DeArmond Gold Foils**
Above left **Klira Triumphator headstock**
Top right **1965 Klira Triumphator**
Middle right **RSA/Selmer Truvoice Model TV8 amplifier**
Above right **Japanese-made Vox VG6 with a 17-watt 1959 Watkins Dominator**
Opposite page **A closer look at the eye-catching finish of the Klira Triumphator**

the early 60s. His first purchase, for example, was a 1963 Höfner President bass, which would be used on The Kaisers' first record. "When I was 16, I saved up my paper round money to buy it from Reno's on Manchester's Oxford Street," recalls Armstrong, who was brought up in the north west and moved to Edinburgh in the 1980s. "It was £60 or £80. I played it in my first live shows with a covers group. It was inspired by Stu Sutcliffe. Even if it wasn't the right model, that's what I was thinking of."

Armstrong quickly moved on to six-strings, with his main studio and stage guitar with The Kaisers being a Höfner Colorama 162 in an understated red and gold colour scheme. With the pots dating back to 1959, it had all the hallmarks of a period classic, although Armstrong very nearly let it slip through his fingers.

"It was the early days of The Kaisers, and George and I went to Glasgow one Saturday afternoon to specifically look round guitar shops," he recalls. "I saw the guitar, played it, thought it was marvellous, and then walked away. I loved it because it was so simple and robust, so I took the day off work on Monday to go back to buy it. At the time, I didn't think it would become the guitar I would use all the time, but it just played so great and made the right noise."

The guitar was duly snapped up for £150, but he didn't stop there. From the cascade of guitar cases Armstrong has brought along with him, he pulls out another Colorama – this time in silver and blue. He explains this 160, which also dates back to 1959, has just undergone a heat treatment to straighten out a bow on the neck, a fret dress and a set-up. He bemoans the paint job, which was applied by the previous owner, but commends the sound.

"It has been repainted really badly at some point, but looks OK from a distance and plays and sounds spot on," he says. "The action could be lower, but that's the way I like it because I play quite hard – it's not going to break. They're very robust."

He continues: "Blindfolded, I couldn't tell them apart – they're both the same spec and the same year, so they should sound similar. I am delighted to have a spare."

In fact, Armstrong has three spares, including a semi-hollow red Höfner Colorama 161 with a single pickup and a six-in-line headstock from 1961. It also needs heat treatment, so will soon be clamped and straightened, but boasts a more >

refined look. Pragmatic as ever, Armstrong says the upgrades are just for show. "They were trying to make it look more expensive than it actually was," he says.

His fascination with the Höfner Colorama goes deeper than simply a need for authenticity. The guitar also encapsulated what The Kaisers were, and what they weren't. "There isn't a famous player associated with the Colorama, so I could go out on stage and nobody would think I was trying to be George Harrison. It was great to reinforce the fact that we weren't trying to be The Beatles."

"I love the Klira Triumphator. It's kind of cheap-feeling, but fun to play. It's great for rhythm"

Hippy-hippy shake

In sharp contrast to the modesty of the Colorama, the Klira Triumphator, from 1965, is all about making an impression. The red rhino skin-style textured vinyl on the body gives it a glamorous, exotic appeal that prompts a sharp intake of breath when it emerges from its case. If the glitz and the glamour of Las Vegas were ever embodied in a guitar, this would be the result.

It was played on stage by Miller – also known as Kaiser George – who admits to selling it to a pawn shop to keep up payments on a saxophone. As custodian of all things 60s, Armstrong rushed in to save the guitar, which he bought for £90.

"I love it," says Miller. "It's kind of cheap-feeling, but fun to play. And it is great for rhythm. Some guitars, you can't really play that choppy style on, but this one has a bounce. A lot of guitars that Matt and I like have a banjo element – that rhythmic quality, and percussive sounds. We're not interested in Jimi Hendrix-style guitars with loads of sustain."

As if to prove it, Miller brandishes his custom-built 'Kaiserette Guitar 2', which became a staple of The Kaisers' set-up and key to their sound. Its 21-fret maple neck and sparkly pickguard disguise an instrument tailored to Kaiser George's exacting >

Above **The charismatic and ever-reliable Selmer Zodiac 30**
Opposite page **Armstrong poses with his Zenith Josh White acoustic**

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Armstrong's Kaisers bandmate George Miller with his custom-built Kaiserette guitar

and atypical standards. "If the guitar is too easy to play, you're not going to sound like a teenager playing it. It's kind of important that you don't sound too fluent," he says. "When beat music becomes too expertly played, it loses everything that it is about."

Authentic amps

Armstrong's dedication to sourcing authentic instruments also extends to amplification and his beloved Selmer Zodiac 30, which sports a worn-in silver and black finish with a mock-crocodile-skin cover and a central light that flashes in time with the onboard tube tremolo. Pushing out 30 watts through a pair of Celestion G12 alnico speakers, what's not to like?

"It sounds as amazing as it looks," he says, "and blew a Vox AC30 right out of the shop when I tried them side by side. Both were £99. I was 17 at the time and negotiated a lift home in the back of a van as part of the purchase from Second Gear in Macclesfield. It was one of my best purchases ever. And certainly one of the heaviest!"

He is also the proud owner of a 1947 RSA/Selmer-Truvoice TV8. "It smells great, probably my best smelling amplifier – and sounds lovely, but doesn't have a very safe circuit in the earthing department," he concedes. "Electric John [John Phillips – The Kaisers' guitar and amp fixer, from Rosslyn] suggested it was never to be used in conjunction with any other electrical equipment! I think I bought it from Live Music, but had to promise not to hold them responsible if I plugged it in!"

During their heyday, The Kaisers had a complete and seemingly unshakable Selmer backline that toured unfailingly. Armstrong says he experienced only one valve failure in about 200 shows. Considering the £99 price tag of his main amp, the Selmer Zodiac, that represents quite a return on his investment.

"It is a different world now, where you can research a particular model online," he says. "Back in the 1980s and 1990s, it was possible to bump into a guitar or amp in a junk shop that you didn't even know existed, but liked the look of. You could take it home for a reasonable sum and thump it on stage the next night. It was more happenstance than planning."

Modern-day beat

Today, Armstrong performs as a singer-songwriter >

SUMMER SONG

This summer, the beat kings will make a special comeback performance at the 100 Club in London. Until a couple of years ago, the band had not played for 15 years, so The Kaisers' 25th anniversary show has been widely anticipated. Making a special guest appearance and his first in Kaisers form since 2006 will be Matt Armstrong.

Armstrong says: "It is an honour, and it will be fun for the fans to see the same fellow up there with the same guitar. I am delighted to be asked. They are still the best band to go and see live. They are just brilliant."

For more details, track down The Kaisers on Facebook

Beat-boom sounds and no mistake

adopting the onstage persona of 'Troy Fridge' and using a Japanese-made Vox VG6 that emulates the Gretsch Country Gent. His instrument was actually unbranded and carries only a Marconi badge because it was removed from a radiogram and added to the headstock. He dates the guitar to 1969/1970 and pairs it with a 17-watt 1959 Watkins Dominator, which features two elliptical speakers in a v-shaped cabinet. "It has been severely meddled with," he admits.

Armstrong also confesses to owning a couple of "newish" guitars, as well as some "posh" marques, but none compare to his Zenith 'Josh White' acoustic, which was bought by his father in 1961 from Boosey & Hawkes in London. The German-made guitar was the catalyst for Armstrong's love affair with music. "It was left in the family home when my parents divorced, so I picked it up and it all started from there! I busked with this guitar all the way through college.

"My dad was a folky – a skiffler, but my brother played it with a metal plectrum and scratched it. So in the wisdom of my youth, I painted it white."

Armstrong owns six acoustics and upwards of 30 electrics. Many more have been stolen, discarded, borrowed or donated. He describes his current collection as an "embarrassment of riches" stocked with examples from an era that changed popular music forever.

"My guitars have a history and they have a story. Most importantly, they make the sound I want to hear"

Many of the guitars in Armstrong's collection were inexpensive to buy; chanced upon in a second-hand shop or in the darker recesses of a local guitar store. Most were purchased before the advent of the internet and eBay. All are charming, characterful and distinctively authentic.

"Sonically, they sound right," Armstrong concludes. "They survived because they work. If they didn't, they would have been binned a long time ago. They have a history, they look attractive and they all have a story. Most importantly, they make the sound that I want to hear."

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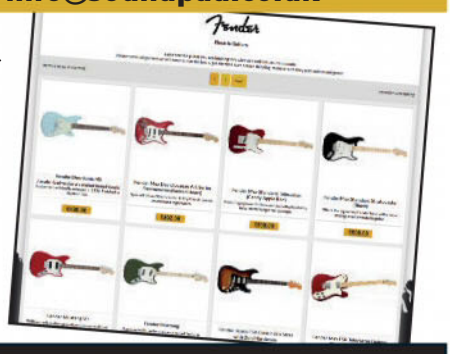

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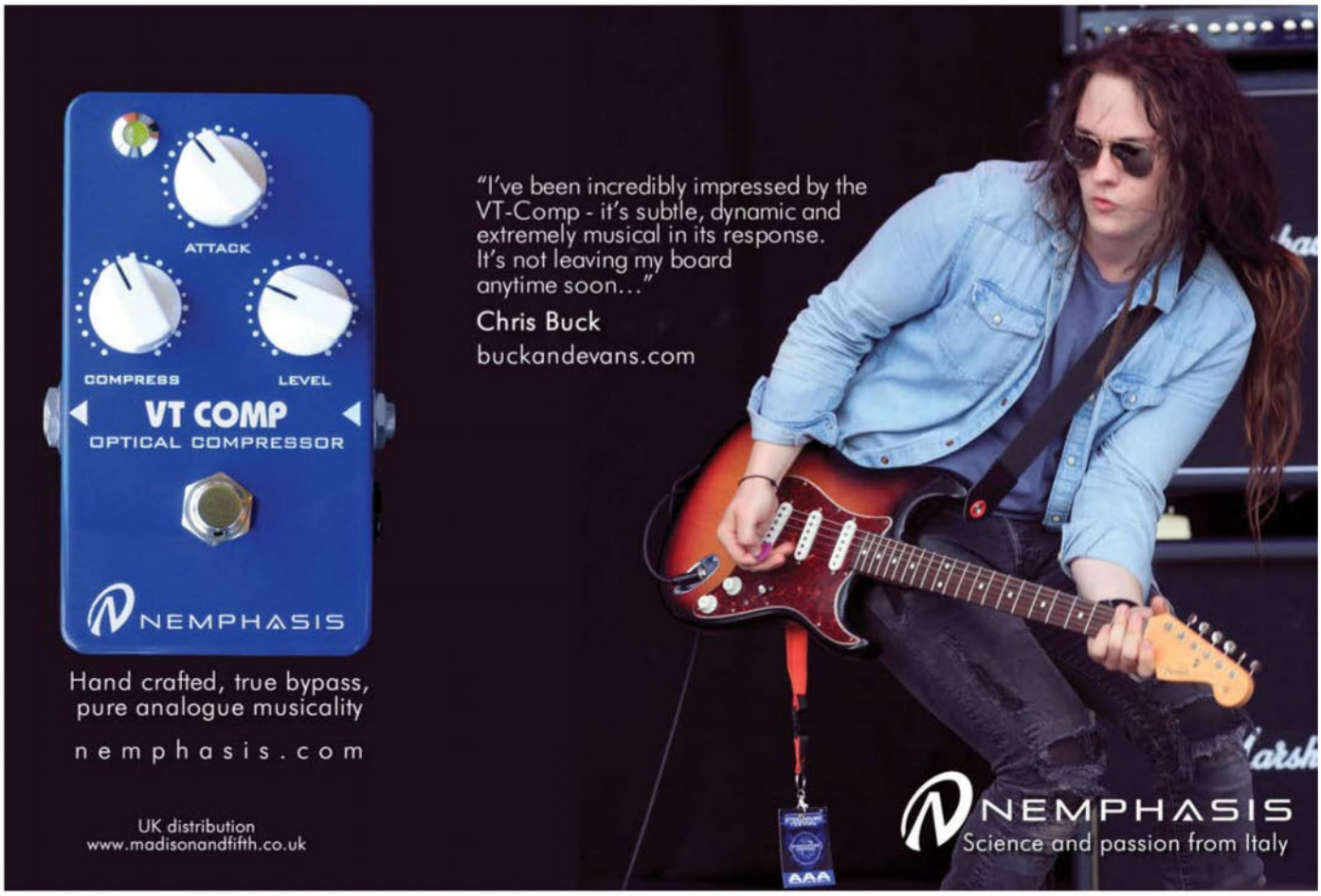

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All about... Fretboard radius

The curve of a guitar's fingerboard can vary considerably, and the feel of its radius is central to the playing experience. **Huw Price** gives you the lowdown on the key things to consider...

In your encounters with guitars thus far, you'll have no doubt noticed that fretboards (aka fingerboards) often differ. Some are flat, some are almost flat and some are very curved. This convex curve is known as the fretboard radius, and it's one of the key features that determines how a guitar plays and feels.

Flat 'boards

We guess everybody is familiar with the chicken-and-egg conundrum, and you could pose a similar question about flat fretboards and the imperative of playing with your thumb positioned dead centre on the back of the neck at all times.

Let's try an experiment. Tuck your thumb out of the way, then form an imaginary barre chord with your left hand and observe the index finger. Most likely, it will be curved. Now, position your thumb approximately where the apex of the neck might be and almost instinctively, your index finger will straighten. If it doesn't, you're probably a drummer and you're reading the wrong magazine. Sorry.

Most classical guitars have flat fretboards, and this suits the classical playing technique as well as low-tension nylon strings. These days, you can get nylon-strung 'crossover' instruments with curved 'boards; these are designed for steel-string acoustic and electric players who want the nylon-string sound without the necessity to develop a whole new way of playing.

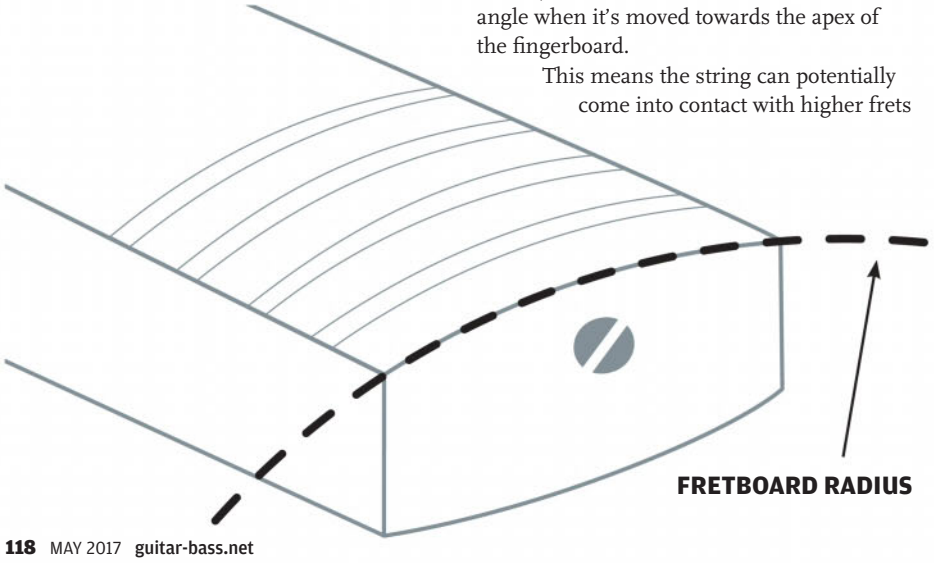
Flat and nearly flat fretboards are also popular for heavier rock, fusion and shredding. Often, these go hand in hand with light-gauge strings. Most guitarists using these techniques find it easier to play at warp speed when the action is low, because relatively little pressure is required to fret a note or hammer on and pull off.

In addition to supersonic scales, these playing styles often involve a lot of string bending with wide vibrato, so ultra-low action can be problematic. If you try to picture it, you'll probably see why.

Some fretboards are flat, some almost flat and some very curved. The radius is one of the key features that determines how your guitar plays

With a curved 'board, the outer strings will be lower than the middle strings (assuming the saddle height conforms to the curve). When you bend the first and second (top E or B) strings, you are essentially pushing the string 'uphill'. Since the saddle height remains constant, instead of angling upwards towards the saddle, the bent string actually levels off, or even takes a downward angle when it's moved towards the apex of the fingerboard.

This means the string can potentially come into contact with higher frets that inhibit or terminate the string vibration. This is known as 'choking' or 'fretting out', and the only sure-fire way to get clean bends with ultra-low action is to have a flat or relatively flat fingerboard. Check the specs on various hard rock and metal guitars, such as Charvels, Jacksons, Ibanez and so forth, and you'll typically see a radius which ranges from 12 inches to 16 inches.



Vintage curves

A low action and clean bends must mean that flat fretboards are the way to go, right? Well, not necessarily, because player comfort is an issue, too, and many players prefer the feel and tone that comes with a higher action. Think back to our air-guitar barre-chord experiment and you may recall how your index finger naturally formed a curve. To form a straight line, you need to push the middle part of your index finger forward, and pushing takes effort.

As much as some of us might like to be continually soloing, whether we're jamming or gigging, we're likely to be playing chords most of the time. Many players find a more curved fretboard radius makes chord playing easier, and if string bends aren't involved, there's nothing to prevent the action from being set low. Of all the big American manufacturers, Fender had the tightest radius. Until the 1980s, Fender's radius was 7.25 inches, but 9.5 inches has become the company standard and you'll find 9.5-inch 'boards on over two thirds of current Fender models.

Although Gibsons with 10-inch radius 'boards have been reported, the company is more closely associated with a 12-inch radius. PRS hedges its bets with 10-inch 'boards; Vintage Danelectros have a 14-inch radius and Martin has always used a 16-inch radius.

Compounding the issue

A compound-radius board is carved to have a tight radius towards the nut that flattens out as you move up the neck. The basic idea is to make chording easier down the neck, while allowing for lower action and easy bending up top. The clearest way to envision this is

Gibson guitars typically have a 12-inch fretboard radius

Paul Reed Smith's 'boards usually have a 10-inch radius

Here's a 1950s Fender neck with the customarily curvy 7.25-inch radius fingerboard

to think of a fretboard shape cut from a cone – the term 'conical radius' is sometimes used.

Our pet theory is that the earliest compound guitar 'boards came about by accident. These days, we're more cautious about levelling vintage fingerboards when a guitar is being re-fretted, but luthiers of old didn't have today's range of specialist tools to work with and some were just a bit gung ho.

If you try to sand out divots at the top of the neck with a flat block rather than a radius block, the upper area of the 'board will probably end up flatter than it was. So it ends up with a compound radius by default. Then, when the re-fret job is complete, the action can be set lower than before and the guitar is easier than ever to play.

Perhaps some clever luthier noticed this, figured out what was going on, then spread the word. In fact, it's well known that Stevie Ray Vaughan's favourite neck underwent so many re-frets that it ended up having a compound radius.

You don't even need to re-radius the 'board to achieve this. Instead, a pseudo-compound radius can be created when fresh frets are levelled, if they're filed flatter over the apex across the upper frets. Most decent techs should be able to do this for you if the new fret wire has enough height.

End-to-end stuff

The fretboard radius has a bearing on string-height settings. Although attention should focus largely on the bridge, you shouldn't overlook the nut slots. If you look at any pro-quality guitar, or a guitar with a pro setup, you'll notice that the nut slots are cut to create a curve for the strings, so their heights above the fretboard remain consistent. In other words, the string radius at the nut and the fretboard radius are more or less identical.

When you're starting out on performing your own setups, adjusting bridge saddles to match the string radius to the fretboard radius is a reasonable way to begin. This isn't a practical approach with bar-style bridges and tune-o-matics, however, because they don't allow for the adjustment of individual string heights.

If you're lucky, the preset radius will be pretty close to the fretboard radius; but if they're quite different, you may have problems making the guitar play well. Vintage Gretsches are notorious, because the bar bridges are often too flat.

When you lower the bridge to make the outside strings feel right, the middle strings can end up too close to the 'board and buzz. Then, if you raise the bridge to make the middle strings ring true, the outside string action will feel too high.

In practice, setting the string height at the bridge to a slightly flatter radius than the 'board makes sense. After all, the strings are generally 2mm or so above 'board level at the first octave, so you can double that at the bridge. That means the string radius can actually be almost a quarter-inch greater than the 'board radius. When you're dealing with a tight radius, like 9.5 inches or 7.25 inches, slightly flattening the string radius – even if it's just for the first and second (B and E) strings – is often essential to prevent fretting out.

Understanding fingerboard radius is important, because it can make a guitar more or less suitable for the style in which you play. Making the right choice can facilitate your playing. As with most things in the guitar world, personal choice is everything, so the best radius is the one that works for you. So, next time you're buying a guitar, consider the fretboard radius as well as the pickups, hardware and colour.

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Chord Clinic

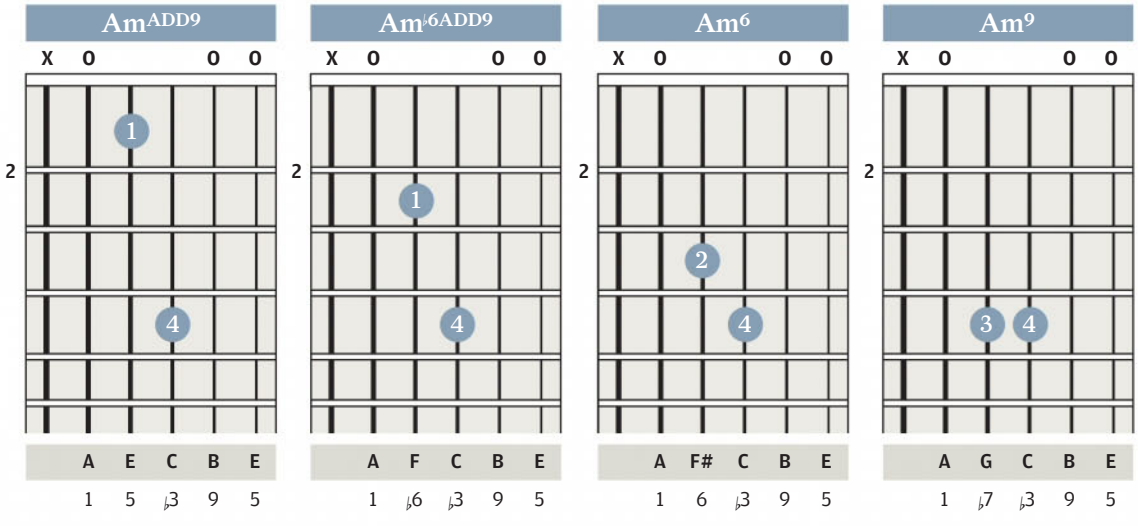
The open strings of the guitar offer unique possibilities for drones and pedal notes; **ROD FOGG** gets textural...

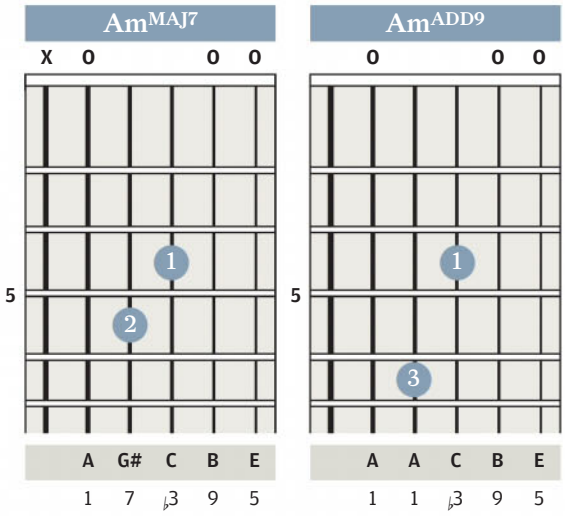
Playing the first two chords of figure 1 back and forth in the style of a moody intro will reveal much of what this month's instalment of Chord Clinic is about. You can strum them or fingerpick them, but either way we are looking at chord voicings that use open strings to create interesting textures – something which comes naturally to the guitar, and which gives it a distinctive edge over keyboard instruments when it comes to harmony. Adding in the third chord from figure 1 and then cycling backwards to include the second chord again makes a four-chord sequence that takes you towards Bond theme territory, with hints of *Skyfall*.

In fact, the whole sequence of six chords works very well if you start on the last chord and work your way backwards to the first, starting and finishing on two different versions of Amadd9. If you make the final two chords last twice as long as the rest, you'll have a four-bar or eight-bar sequence, all exploiting the juicy dissonance between the open B string and the fingered C on the fifth fret of the G string. Cue orchestral strings, percussion, female vocalist and roll the credits...

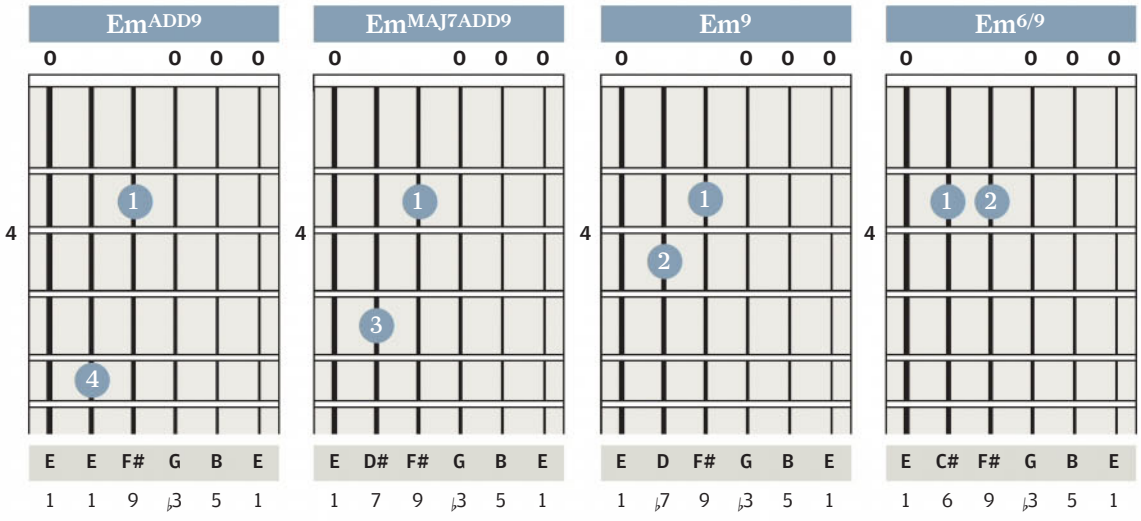
Figure 2 introduces a similar idea, based around an E minor chord. This time, the dissonance comes from the F sharp on the D string sounding against the open G string. The eight chords make a repeating eight-bar chord sequence that sounds particularly good >

A minor descent (Fig 1)

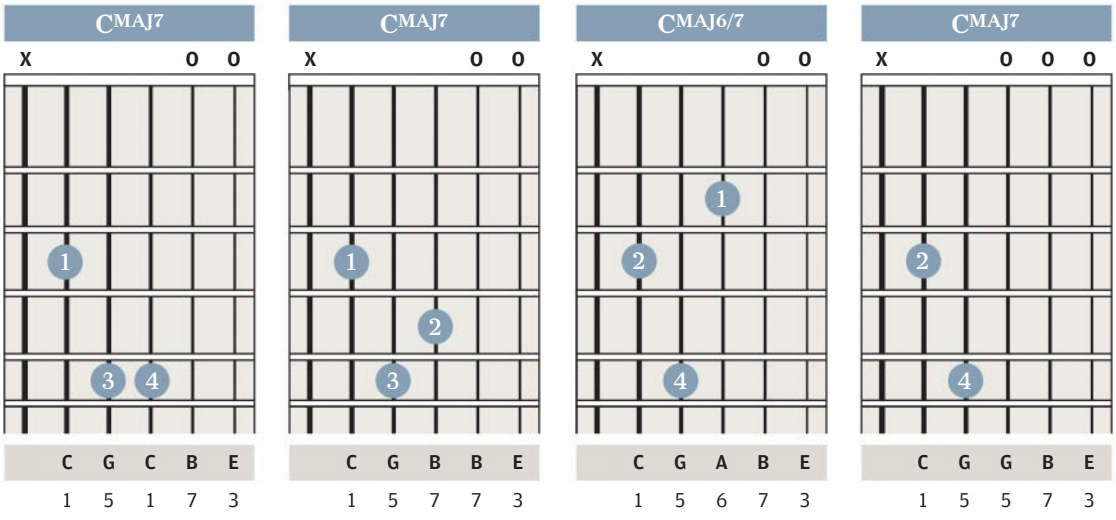




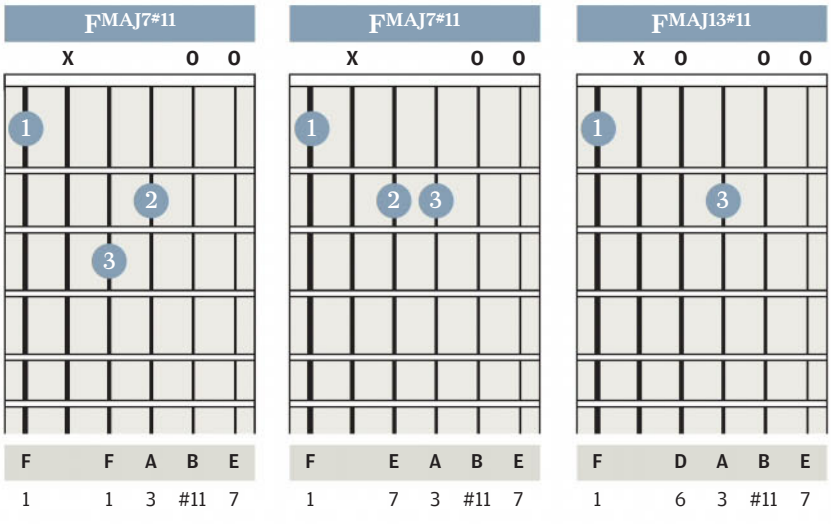
Even deeper (Fig 2)



Climbing C major (Fig 3)



Falling from F (Fig 4)



with arpeggios; feel free to ignore the low E string so that the descending notes on the A string make the bassline. Chord names can get fairly complex when you play in this style – check out F#7b9add11/A#; that's 'F sharp seven flat nine add eleven over A sharp' – quite a mouthful, but not too much of a handful! The B7 chord at the end effectively sends you back to the beginning of the sequence.

Just in case you begin to get the idea that this sort of thing works only with minor chords, figures 3 and 4 explore some ideas using C major and F major as starting points. Figure 3 looks at the possibilities of creating a descending line on the G string, and in doing so adds some interesting doubled notes with the open B and G strings. Figure 4 has a descending line on the D string, while the open B string sounds against the A on the G string, second fret.

Both figures probably work best with arpeggios, but if you do decide to strum, try to mute the open A string using the underside of your index finger when you play the chords from figure 4. Played in the order that they appear, each set of chords makes a good four-bar sequence – you will need to cycle back to the second chord in figure 4 as your fourth chord. They also work well played as an eight-bar sequence, with figure 4 following figure 3 in a dreamy major-seven heat haze suggesting that spring has sprung. See if you can find some of your own textural ideas by mixing in some extra open strings with the chords you know. More next month.

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: guitar ownership, finding a luthier & the vintage guitar debate

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Town and country

As a semi-retired person, I quite often get to see the BBC afternoon programme *Escape To The Country*, a programme in which people wishing to move to the countryside are introduced to three rural properties for sale.

I'm amazed that when the potential buyers are viewed looking round the houses/cottages, how many of the properties have guitars on show; I would estimate 30 per cent. At first, I thought it may be a prop put there to make the property visually desirable or simply give an image of creativity. However, I soon noticed that the types of guitar vary enormously, although there are an awful lot of Dreadnought acoustics.

Some properties feature a number of guitars, which in my own experience is quite normal, as almost every guitarist I know owns more than one, and commonly like myself, around five or six.

Are there any national statistics on guitar ownership or guitar sales, and would there be a significant difference between town and country?

Ray Owen, Watford

G&B While it's difficult to get a breakdown of sales data by anything other than region, which would be skewed as most retailers are in urban locations, your letter does make us wonder whether there are some impressive collections out there in the sticks...

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Tech support

As a chartered engineer, I admit that I'm pretty fussy about jobs being done properly – and increasingly, I find I'm really reluctant to trust my guitars to a 'luthier' (the inverted commas are based on my most recent experience where, despite very positive reviews, I got a big bill, amateurish workmanship and a worse guitar, which I eventually sorted out myself).

I'm not a luthier, but I do have skill and patience. For example, I improved my Martin a lot with a hand-made saddle cut from a solid bone and filed to an accuracy of about 50 microns, together with nut mods and rod adjustment.

I recognise, though, that sometimes you simply need a professional, but I'm now nervous of trusting a stranger with my guitars and my money without some confidence in their expertise. For me, word-of-mouth or reviews aren't enough, and although there are trade directories, these tend to be just the luthiers themselves describing the scope of the work they can do. I've read of some luthiers who are obviously geniuses with guitars, but I couldn't justify the huge prices they charge for my modest guitars.

Is there a way to be sure of getting competent service at a reasonable price, or is it simply a matter of asking around and risking mistakes until you get someone you're happy with? The alternative, of course, is for manufacturers to make sure their guitars aren't despatched until they're properly set up...

John Minshull, Nantwich, Cheshire

G&B Hi John, in our experience, word of mouth is still your best bet. Can any readers recommend a skilled luthier in Cheshire?

Emperor's new clothes

I am sorry, but I don't subscribe to this notion that battered and worn guitars should be considered the Holy Grail, it just looks skanky and worthy of a bonfire. Who wants to touch something that has been ruined by sweat and goodness knows what? It's about time we stopped this 'emperor's new clothes' attitude to crap like this.

Andrew S Redding, via email

G&B While artificial ageing is contentious, extensive natural playing wear can often be the sign of a great guitar. You may well be in the minority on this one, Andrew!

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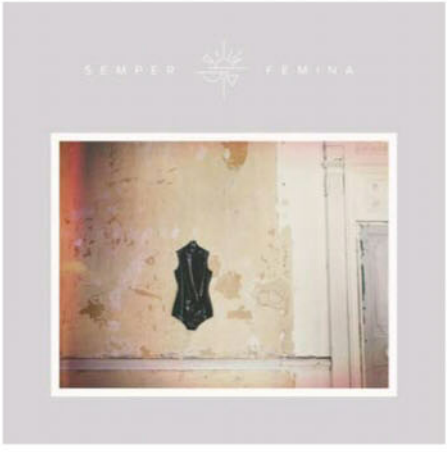
New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues



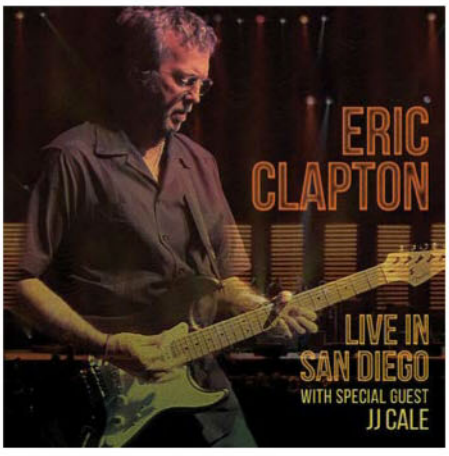
Laura Marling

SEMPER FEMINA

Marling's sixth album has more than a touch of the composed, intense brevity of 2010's *I Speak Because I Can* and is a record built around contemplation of female identity. *Wild Fire* is a beautifully executed piece of Laurel Canyon soul with a gentle throbbing tremolo and a snare sound oddly like a sneezing horse, while *The Valley* attempts to understand another woman's sense of loss against a hypnotic, fingerpicked motif. *Next Time* showcases some lovely delicate acoustic playing before a manic, fuzzy string break suggests it may not be so easy to banish the ghosts. Blake Mills produces, and his fondness for pushing familiar sounds beyond their natural confines has a subtle but defining impact. It concludes with the melodic crunch of *Nothing, Not Nearly* and a swooning chorus before an abrupt end. **GJ**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Joni Mitchell, Lisa Hannigan*



Eric Clapton

LIVE IN SAN DIEGO WITH SPECIAL GUEST JJ CALE (DVD)

This decade-old Clapton concert presented an opportunity for EC to get together with his great pal, the now sadly-departed JJ Cale – who, in *After Midnight* and *Cocaine*, wrote two of the songs most closely associated with Clapton over the years. As well as the five-song segment they play on stage, there's extra footage here of the pair in rehearsals, but Cale is far from the only extra world-class fretsmith on display, as Clapton's touring band includes Doyle Bramhall II and the peerless Derek Trucks, with Robert Cray turning up at the end to tear through *Crossroads*, too. Clapton is relaxed, with road-honed chops, smiling his way throughout the blues-punctuated set – making this a must-see for fans and a standout among his documented live performances. **CM**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *JJ Cale, Tedeschi Trucks Band*

ON THE Guitar OFFICE STEREO

Holly MacVe

GOLDEN EAGLE

Galway-born, Yorkshire-raised Holly MacVe belies her birthplace on this stunningly beautiful debut that sounds every bit as if it was written in Nashville and was recorded at Sun Studio. MacVe's beautiful lilting head voice evokes both Tammy Wynette and modern day alt-country cult heroine Sharon Van Etten. The production, handled by Lanterns On The Lake guitarist and *G&B* contributor Paul Gregory, is tasteful and sparing throughout, with some yearning pedal steel adornments on *The Corner Of My Mind* and strings and piano adding to the melancholy brew. *All Of Its Glory* is a mournful mid-album centrepiece of the finest quality. MacVe's acoustic playing is crisp and clever with intelligent chord sequences, and the maturity of the compositions is striking for a 21-year-old's debut release. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Gillian Welch, Sharon Van Etten*

The Shins

HEARTWORMS

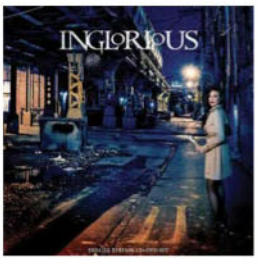
The indie icons' first record for five years returns to the 60s-influenced songwriting that underpinned the band's earlier success. *Cherry Hearts*, *Dead Alive* and *Heartworms* all have Johnny Marr-esque rhythm guitar to the fore and demonstrate The Shins' hallmarks of soaring melodic vocals, surreal wordplay, unexpected chord changes and off-kilter production. The sophisticated merging of disparate influences and styles will reward repeat listens. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Beach Boys, Modest Mouse*

Inglorious

II



Inglorious II takes up where the UK rockers' debut left off. It's a familiar world where riffs are solid, solos are unashamedly histrionic and songs have well-worn titles such as *Black Magic* and *High Class Woman*. The influences – Whitesnake, Aerosmith and Deep Purple – are worn proudly on their denim sleeves and the self-production nails the genre, while guitarists Andreas Eriksson and Will Taylor demonstrate some tasty chops. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Whitesnake, Aerosmith*

Pulled Apart By Horses

THE HAZE

Barging through opener *The Haze*, PABH rekindle the fearlessness of their debut. *The Big What If* is littered with the pop sensibilities that have grown with each album; singer Tom Hudson snarls "I'm melting faces" on *Hotel Motivation*, his vocals reminiscent of Perry Farrell and Billy Idol. Song titles are charmingly brazen – *Neighbourhood Witch*, *What's Up Dude*. PABH aren't championing slick rock 'n' roll; this is a beer-drenched, delirious liberation from polished radio-friendly indie. **SR**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Dinsoaur Pile-Up, Vant*

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SUZI QUATRO

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

The singer, songwriter and bass ace talks Elvis, Barry Manilow and the occasional diva moment...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"Well, a few things. My piano for one... It is the orchestra of my life. I love to play classics that I learned as a child, and to write songs. And, of course, my bass guitar, my best friend since the age of 14. Non-musical would be my Scrabble game – I am addicted."

2 In another life I would be...
"A psychologist or a criminal lawyer."

3 The moment that started it all...
"I guess when I saw Elvis at six years old on TV... I thought to myself, 'I am going to be him'.

4 The one that got away...
"I had a huge crush on a bigwig from Japan. Many years... then, finally single, I had the chance and didn't do anything about it. What a jerk!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"So so many, I could write a book. I got to a hotel with the rest of the band, got my key, went to my room, took one quick look, stormed back to reception in front of everyone and screamed, 'Why am I the only one without a shower? I'm the star of the show'. Diva in full flow. The guy behind the desk simply took my arm, led me back to my room, went inside, opened a door on the right and said, 'There is your bathroom'. Oh my God!"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"From my dad: when you go out on stage give everything you've got, or don't go out at all, and always with full faculties. This has stood me in good stead in the rock business, which is a world of excess."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"On guitar, I always play a blues riff. Bass, I play my best bassline, walking through the changes. It's the line that opens my BBC Radio 2 show, Quatrophonic."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"A bottle of Chardonnay for a glass of wine after the gig. Essential."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"I love Barry Manilow."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"Saxophone."

The Legends Live tour 2017, featuring Suzi Quatro, David Essex, The Osmonds and Hot Chocolate, takes in eight arena dates starting on 13 October. For ticket details, go to www.legendslive.org

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

Stand Out in the Crowd

System 10 Stompbox Digital Wireless Guitar System

The innovative digital wireless guitar system from Audio-Technica that fits right on your pedal board. Pair up to 8 guitars with separate body pack transmitters for easy on stage changeovers, and either mute, tune or use a second rig with the A-B switching. With a discreet clip bodypack, sturdy metal pedal casing, and no large intrusive aerials, it is ready to go straight from the box to the stage. Operating on the 2.4GHz range, it is also both interference and wireless license free.

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INTRODUCING

Space Spiral

Delay Dream Machine

The Space Spiral is an analog-voiced delay pedal with a variable waveshape LFO hitting the repeated signal for a world of warm modulated echo tones.

Its 30ms-600ms of delay time delivers everything from fast and punchy slaps to dark and dreamy ambience. While the super-versatile mod section lets you sculpt your wave to perfection, helping you easily recreate classic tape-like flutters, oil-drum spins as well as never heard before modulated madness.

Each Space Spiral is built by the hands of cadets on the red line overload through the starry skies of Akron, Ohio, USA.

So if you're a fan of murky-sounding oil can delays or warbly old-school tape echo machines, the Space Spiral is totally going to tickle your tone bone.

www.earthquakerdevices.com/space-spiral

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THE JOY OF FX

SPRING 2017

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The Shopping List

Pedal addict **SAM ATKINS** rounds up the new stompbox releases that should be on your radar

Analog Alien Joe Walsh Double Classic

This dual-effect pedal combines a compressor and a classic '59 Tweed Deluxe-sounding drive with a pre/post switch for ordering. It's also permanently on Joe Walsh's live and studio pedalboards. **analogalien.com**

Alexander Pedals Sky Fi

A reverb/delay boasting 800ms of delay time, three switchable modes, hold function and wet/dry output. Little wonder that Reeves Gabrels grabbed a Sky Fi pedal at NAMM 2017 and used it on stage the same night! **alexanderpedals.com**

Fuzzrocious Baxstabber

A Baxandall-based EQ pedal perfect for those Fender and Marshall-style tone stacks. It also features a 12-stage rotary knob to tweak your tone a reported 144 different ways. **fuzzrociouspedals.com**

Deep Trip Stormy Monday

The Stormy Monday is a low/medium-gain drive pedal that has been six years in the making. Deep Trip makes vintage-sounding pedals using totally new circuit designs, and this is a unique drive pedal. **deeptripland.com**

Electro-Harmonix Blurst

One for lovers of modulation, filters and sonic wizardry. The Blurst has its roots in the world of synthesisers and keyboards, but this pedal is aimed straight at bass and guitar players. **ehx.com**

Catalinbread Formula No. 55

The No. 55 is a foundation drive that replicates the sweet tones of the 5E3 Tweed Deluxe (with impressive levels of accuracy!). We heard it in action at NAMM and loved it. **catalinbread.com**

Chase Bliss Audio Brothers

We're big fans of this boutique pedal maker, and the Brothers offers overdrive, distortion and fuzz tones with the usual mind-bogglingly vast array of controls we have come to expect. A must-try. **chaseblissaudio.com**

JHS Pedals VCR

A collaboration between Ryan Adams and Josh Scott has produced the achingly cool 80s-inspired VCR (volume, chorus and reverb) pedal. Control over isolating the effects is a big plus. **jhspedals.com**

Pigtronix Disnortion Micro

The original Disnortion pedal can still be found on pedalboards of stadium-filling bands, and now Pigtronix has squeezed this into a micro package, including series/parallel and a six-stage CMOS overdrive circuit. **pigtronix.com**

EarthQuaker Devices Space Spiral

Not your standard 30ms to 600ms delay pedal. EQD has dipped into the pool of modulated digital processors and pulled out a pedal that goes from slapback to oscillated otherness! Read the review on p22. **earthquakerdevices.com**

Way Huge Conquistador & Russian Pickle

Fuzz pedals are much loved and ubiquitous in nature. Refreshingly, Way Huge produces some startlingly great ones – including the new Conquistador, an aggressive gated fuzz, and the Russian Pickle for lovers of 90s-era grunge and modern stoner and desert rock fans. **jimdunlop.com**

Empress Effects Echo System

This dual-stereo, MIDI and SD card-ready delay is what obsessive attention to detail looks and sounds like. It recreates analogue and vintage sounds, and introduces new delay sounds that have got us hooked. **empresseffects.com**

Satellite Amps Fogcutter

The Fogcutter nails some truly vintage-inspired natural amp distortion tones (using rare Germanium diodes). Two distortion options are available, along with a clean boost using a three-way toggle. **satelliteamps.com**

Mooer Audio Devin Townsend Ocean Machine

Devin has worked with Mooer to produce a pedal absolutely teeming with features, making this delay, reverb and looper pedal something that is sure to make the big hitters sit up and take notice. **mooeraudio.co.uk**

DigiTech FreqOut

Want to get natural-sounding feedback without cranking your amp? DigiTech has created a pedal that can push your signal into feedback whether you use distortion or not – and at any volume.

digitech.com

Hotone Wally+

An upgraded Wally looper for 2017 adds a few extra features, including a USB interface for transferring audio using the free Hotone software and 11 switchable banks for storing your loops.

hotoneaudio.com

Walrus Audio RED

The RED is a high-gain distortion pedal for everything metal, doom, punk and downright aggressive. With a 3-band EQ onboard, along with a texture switch for diode choices, if you want to get nasty, it's hard to beat.

walrusaudio.com

Wren And Cuff Sonder

The Sonder is another pedal that covers two effect types, combining bucket brigade chorus and tremolo with tap tempo features. Both sides can be used independently or ordered to your preference, and it has a handy volume/boost control. **wrenandcuff.com**

Keeley Engineering Super Phat Mod

Looking for an old tube-driven amp tone? The JFET-loaded Super Phat Mod is perfect for country, blues and rock fans. The Phat mode beefs things up for single-coil players, too.

robertkeeley.com

Anatomy of...

DIGITECH FREQOUT

Nine bright red LEDs tell us that the FreqOut is on, and illuminate corresponding to the onset rate of the feedback

The dry switch determines whether the dry signal can be heard or not. Turn it off for haunting EBow-like swells

The gain & onset knobs control the ratio of feedback to dry signal and the time that elapses before the onset of the feedback

The type dial gives you a choice of seven types of harmonic feedback, at a sub-octave, 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 5th harmonic, plus 'natural' low and high sounds

The single footswitch turns the feedback effect on and off, and acts as either a latching or momentary switch depending on the position of the momentary toggle switch. When it's on, feedback is produced only when the footswitch is held down. With momentary off, it acts like a standard on/off switch

Star Boards

That Pedal Show host and TheGigRig mainman **DAN STEINHARDT** has been obsessed with stompboxes since the early 1990s. He's built pedalboards for some of the biggest names in the business – here are the stories behind six of his favourites...

Radiohead's chief sonic architect needs no introduction, and when he needed a studio board for 2016 album *A Moon Shaped Pool*, Dan got the call

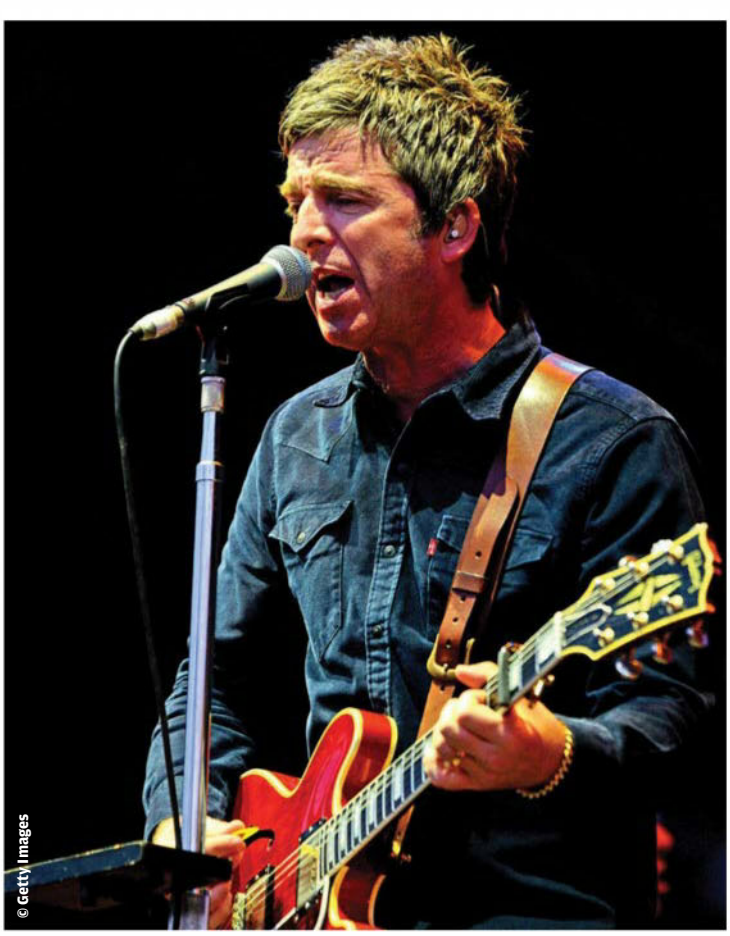
ED O'BRIEN RADIOHEAD

The album *OK Computer* had a massive effect on me, and I've been a huge Radiohead fan ever since. Ed wanted a board to help him effortlessly create new sounds in the studio. We used a Pedaltrain Grande as the platform for the simple reason that Ed needed access to all the pedals on the board. If you've ever seen Radiohead live, you'll see Ed tinkering with his rig a lot. What he's doing is creating loops and changing the textures live by manipulating his pedals. It's amazing to see and sounds superb. The board features wet/dry capability so Ed can split the signal and send his heavily effected tones to one or two amps, but just his dry gain and overdrive tones to a separate amp. It's a great way to keep clarity when using a very dense effected sound. It also features a wonderful old Memory Man delay and a rare CSL Super Fuzz. This board was used on *Moon Shaped Pool*. I'm honoured to have also built Ed's boards for the recent Radiohead tour. If you want to see how it all went together, google 'Ed O'Brien pedalboard' and you'll see the YouTube video I did of the build.

© Getty Images

NOEL GALLAGHER

Noel contacted me about putting together a board for the recording of a new album. We met up and discussed exactly what it was that he was after, and to my delight, I discovered that Noel is seriously into pedals, and gear in general. He's as into it as any of us are. I don't know why I found it surreal, but Noel is no different to the rest of us when it comes to wanting to sound the best he possibly can. The idea behind this board was that Noel could quickly and easily swap out pedals to try different stuff in the studio as the song required. The loops were labelled up with genres, as opposed to specific pedals, so if he wanted to try a different fuzz, he'd just swap out the current pedal for the new one. That way, when he activated the 'FUZZ' button it was still turning on the correct pedal. I had the great pleasure of visiting Noel a couple of times in the studio when the board was being used, and can say that it did indeed sound superb.

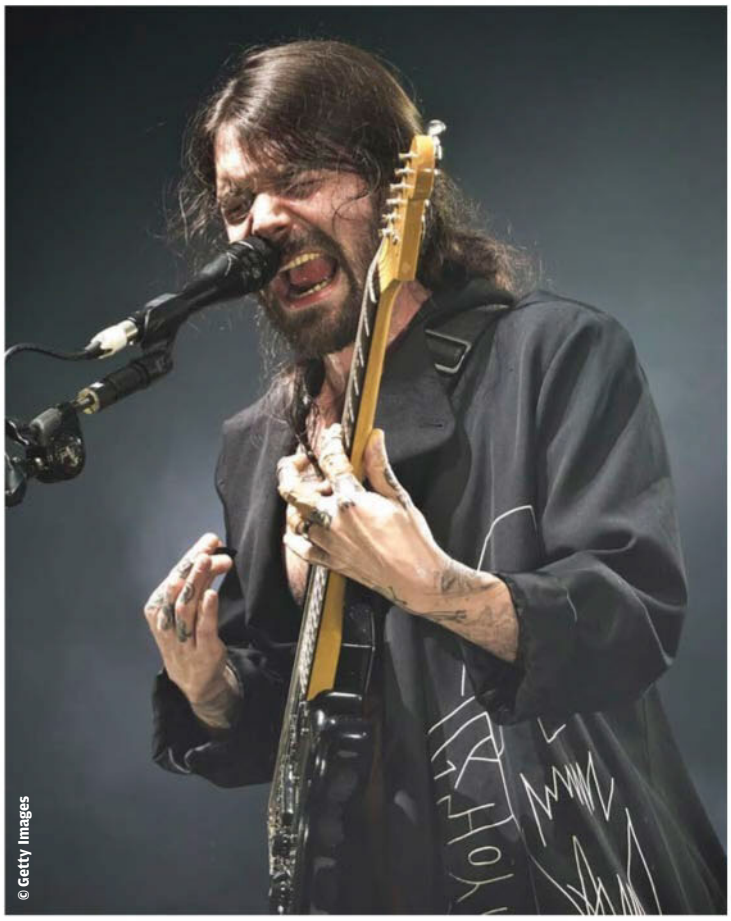


Noel's appetite for pedals has only increased since the demise of Oasis, and Dan was only too happy to put together The Chief's new setup

Biffy Clyro are one of Dan's favourite bands, so when he was asked to work on guitarist and frontman Simon Neil's rig, there was only ever going to be one answer!

SIMON NEIL BIFFY CLYRO

I've included this rig in the six because firstly, I'm a huge Biffy Clyro fan ('mon the biff!) and secondly, it was a massive project involving loads of customisation, that I was extremely honoured to have been asked to contribute to. This rig is complete with onstage units controlling offstage racks, switching everything from pedals to multiple amps and MIDI devices, as well as an entire redundant system running alongside the main system, so that if an amp should blow the only action required would be for Richard (Simon's tech) to flick a switch and the second rig will seamlessly take over from the first. To date, they've never had to flick that switch, but I interviewed Simon Neil for an episode of *That Pedal Show*, where we talked about his rig - which was fascinating. He was saying how now that he has so much more faith in the gear, it has had a really positive effect on his live performances. I've seen Biffy live more than any other UK artist, I'll always go and see them whenever possible. They're a truly epic band.



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DAVE KILMINSTER

Dave is one of my favourite guitar players, and one of my favourite people. I've built two rigs for him, one for his duties in the Steven Wilson band, which is spectacular. If you are not already aware of Steven's work I urge all of you to check him out. The other board I built is this one. I had to include this because the board was onstage with Dave at Coachella when he performed with Roger Waters. Dave has been Roger's guitar player for many years now, and he does a superb job. His sound is devastating, one of the best live guitar sounds I've ever heard. A mixture of a supremely talented guitar player, carefully considered effects and the wonderful Brunetti amps he uses deliver something very special. This rig has some effects in the front of the amp, plus the time-based effects (delays and reverbs) in the amp's effects loop. It's a great mixture of modern technology, such as the Strymons [BigSky, Timeline, Flint and Lex], with old-school analogue such as the Fulltone Deja Vibe. There's even a Talk Box on there for a couple of tracks from Pink Floyd's *Animals*.

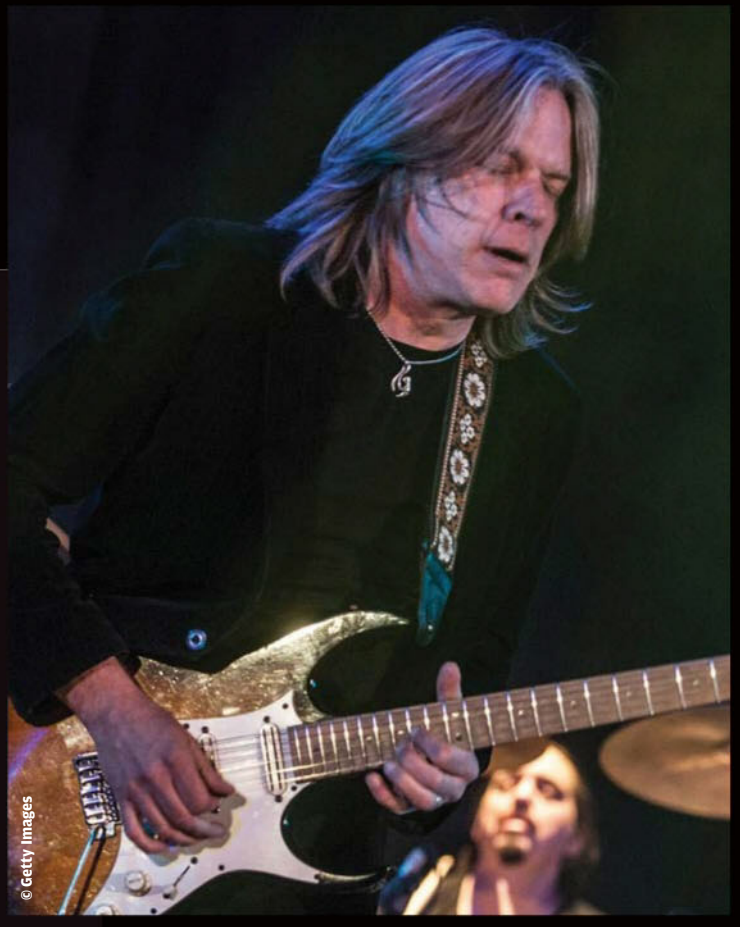
© Getty Images

The prog ace has worked alongside Roger Waters and Steven Wilson, and is a phenomenal guitar player. Dan has built not one but two boards for him

When the Danger Danger and Andy Timmons Band mainman neeeded to send his board on a weight loss diet, Dan came to the rescue

ANDY TIMMONS

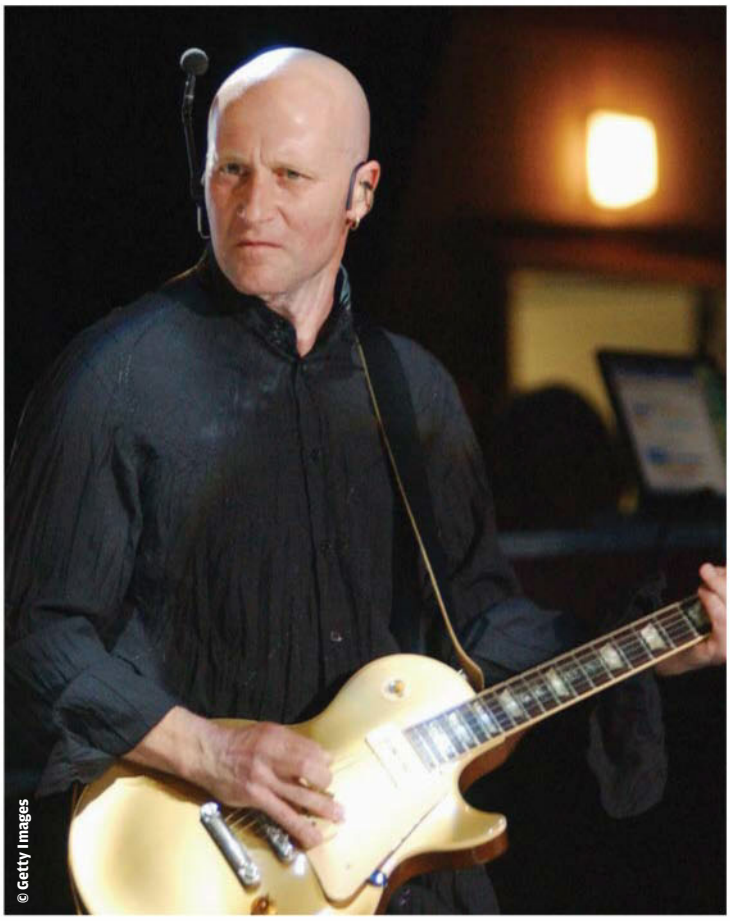
I'm such a big Andy Timmons fan. When you hear Andy play, you realise what good technique is for. He channels emotion, and his tone sounds like his guitar is singing. Andy had a board he flew with that weighed a tonne. It was so heavy he had to take a lot of the pedals off and pack them in his bag separately so it would make weight for the plane. During an interview we did for *That Pedal Show*, I convinced him to let me replace that monstrosity with a board I'd make for him. The only issue was Andy has no down time. So, we came up with a plan - I would build the new rig using my pedals to make sure everything fit, then Mick and I would fly to Frankfurt, where Andy was playing with the Simon Phillips Band, and film the new board build. I had two hours to put his new board together, and immediately after, with no soundcheck, Andy hit the stage. The board performed flawlessly and has continued to ever since. It came in at 10 kilos lighter than the old board, so no more removing pedals at the airport. Andy has become a very dear friend, and apart from my wife and Mick Taylor, there's no one else in the world I'd rather hang out with.



© Getty Images

DAVID RHODES

I've known Chris Lawson, David's tech, for a long time. Over the years, Chris has contacted me to get a few bits and pieces for David's rig. Then Chris called me and asked if I'd like to go and see David play with Peter Gabriel on his recent tour, which of course I was delighted to. I've loved Peter Gabriel's music from when I was a young musician in Australia, so to finally see him live was incredible. David asked me if I'd like to build a new rig for him, for a top-secret project. I had no idea what I was building this for until after the board was completed. David was delighted with his new rig and invited my wife and I to see it in action on the opening night of Kate Bush's run of gigs at the Hammersmith Apollo. Truly spectacular. The rig is quite simple really, all the loops are controlled by the QuarterMaster true bypass strip. The only slightly odd thing is that the loops are wired in reverse, so the input is on the left and the output is on the right. This board, coupled with David's Rivera amps, really did sound incredible. David used this rig for Kate, and is using it with Peter Gabriel.


© Getty Images

Having already worked with Peter Gabriel, David Rhodes got in touch with Dan requesting a new board for a high-profile top-secret project...

SOUND ADVICE

"One of the great joys of my life is helping guitar players achieve a sound that allows them to truly express. Each of these boards have two things in common – super clean power and switching that takes the pedals out of signal path when they're not being used, so that the guitar signal is only going through what it needs to. With every rig I've ever done, from the simple to the super complex, getting these two things right is absolutely essential and can make the difference between good and great tone. Then you need to consider that these rigs are going on aircraft and being thrown around by baggage handlers who consider flightcase throwing an Olympic sport. The rig can sound incredible, but if it's not reliable it's pointless.
A big part of the artist's ability to create music is the confidence that they can rely on their gear to get the job done. This is where attention to detail comes in.
If you're building your own rig, consider carefully how to get it sounding the best it can and how it will be used. Do it right and you'll have a system that inspires you to play your best and performs flawlessly night after night."

GET THE SOUND
Dan Auerbach

As we impatiently await his second solo album, *G&B* delves into some of the key effects behind The Black Keys and Arcs star's influential and timeless tone

An acclaimed record producer and gear aficionado of note – whether vintage or modern – Akron, Ohio's finest fretsmith has created a succession of timeless guitar tones throughout his career with The Black Keys, The Arcs and on his solo work. Auerbach's live sound derives from combining a cast of oddball vintage guitars (a Guild Thunderbird, a Harmony Stratotone, Teiscos, Kents, Supros, Silvertones and many more) into a blended rig of modified classic amps (among them a Marshall JTM45 or 50, a Fender Quad Reverb, vintage Danelectros and a Victoria Double Deluxe). His pedal combinations are sorted into separate loops and triggered by a MIDI switching system onstage, or remotely by guitar tech Dan Johnson.

Auerbach changes guitars restlessly to deliver a varied range of riffs – from muscular, gnarly octave-blended fuzzy garage blues tones to shimmering tape-echo drenched rock 'n' roll rhythms. But while Auerbach's tones may have morphed and shapeshifted over the years – by his own estimation, he's used more than 100 pedals during his career – at their heart, he still relies on a few signature stompbox staples to bring his sounds to life, both live and in the studio.

Here, *G&B* takes a closer look at some of these (black) key ingredients, together with some alternatives you should investigate to help you get closer to his sound...

FUZZ

Dan Auerbach is a fuzz fanatic, so he's used all kinds on his boards over the years. His trustiest live sidekick is an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi – the tank-like Green Russian or Sovtek variety, made in the mid-1990s and used for much of The Black Keys' early material. He has also regularly used a Rosak Nu-Wa Fuzz Wah (but for its fuzz, not as a wah) and a Shin-Ei Companion fuzz, which has more of an octave-fuzz flavour, and can be heard from the *Brothers* album onwards.

Boutique Choice
EARTHQUAKER DEVICES HOOF
- **PRICE** $165
- **CONTACT** earthquakerdevices.com

EarthQuaker based this on the same green Muff circuit favoured by Auerbach – he has one on his backup board, and the company gets bonus points for being from Akron, Ohio, too.

Budget Buy
EHX NANO BIG MUFF PI
- **PRICE** £62
- **CONTACT** ehx.com

OCTAVE

Although some of Auerbach's fuzzes have a built-in octave effect, Boss's OC-3 Super Octave is a versatile polyphonic-octave pedal with beefy low-end coverage and a drive control for fattening up fuzz.

Boutique Choice
TAURUS AMPLIFICATION DEXTER MK-2
- **PRICE** £190
- **CONTACT** taurus-amp.pl

A polyphonic octaver with two blendable octaves, plus level and range controls for removing unwanted frequencies.

Budget Buy
BEHRINGER UO300
- **PRICE** £22.49
- **CONTACT** music-group.com

FIVE AUERBACH EFFECTS MOMENTS

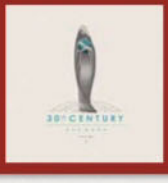
RUBBER FACTORY
10 A.M. Automatic
(2004) A great riff, a simple, scratchy, reverb-soaked rhythm sound and a gnarly, disgusting fuzz – what's not to like?

EL CAMINO
Money Maker
(2011) A one-off use of a Dunlop HT-1 Heil Talkbox: "*They've sort of become a joke, but they're amazing*," Auerbach noted.

KEEP IT HID
I Want Some More
(2009) A scuzzy main riff tone gives way to feedback squalls and an octave-lead sound that's simply irresistible.

TURN BLUE
Weight Of Love
(2015) Soaring fuzz melodies and a harmony solo outro on this sprawling, Floyd-flavoured oddity from the Keys' latest.

THE ARCS, FROM 30TH CENTURY RECORDS COMPILATION VOLUME I
Fools Gold
(2015) Trebly fuzz tones with a ghostly decay, and tremolo howls.



EQUALISATION

Auerbach uses the MXR Ten Band EQ live in a 'frowning' pattern, to restore some of the midrange sapped by his vintage fuzz pedals.

Boutique Choice
EMPRESS PARAEQ
- **PRICE** $249
- **CONTACT** empresseffects.com

A top-quality EQ pedal with onboard boost, for obsessive fine-tuning of your tone.

Budget Buy
MXR 6B SIX BAND EQ
- **PRICE** £96
- **CONTACT** jimdunlop.com

MODULATION

A fearless user of phaser effects, Auerbach uses Boss's tap tempo, multi-stage omni-directional PH-3 Phase Shifter live for *Tighten Up* – at three minutes in, listen out for the phaser-y lead sound with added killswitch for rhythmic emphasis.

Boutique Choice
CHASE BLISS AUDIO WOMBTONE MKII
- **PRICE** £349
- **CONTACT** chaseblissaudio.com

All-analogue phaser covering all flavours of phase, with control over waveform shapes, the number of stages and tap tempo.

Budget Buy
JOYO JF-328 NEBULOUS PHASE
- **PRICE** £49
- **CONTACT** joyoeffectpedals.co.uk

ECHO

Fulltone's Custom Shop Tube Tape Echo is a modernisation of the classic Echoplex valve-based tape delay, and is a more versatile and better-made reboot of the vintage Holy Grail it's based on. Coating his tone in vintage-style wow and flutter, it's set to run continuously through Auerbach's Marshall for a tight slapback-style echo; as of 2014, Auerbach has also used a Strymon El Capistan as a live standby.

Boutique Choice
STRYMON EL CAPISTAN
- **PRICE** £299
- **CONTACT** strymon.net

With three tape echo emulations in one and full control over 10 parameters, plus tap tempo, this has all the echo you'll ever need.

Budget Buy
TONE CITY TAPE MACHINE
- **PRICE** £49
- **CONTACT** tonecityaudio.com

TREMOLO

Auerbach uses tremolo prominently on tracks such as *Next Girl*, but it's often employed as a subtler flavour. Boss's stalwart TR-2 Tremolo (modded by Analog Man) is his preferred pedal for the effect, with its rate and depth joined by a third wave control to alter the shape of the LFO waveform from triangle to square.

Boutique Choice
FULLTONE SUPA-TREM2
- **PRICE** £189
- **CONTACT** fulltone.com

With true stereo circuits, phase correction and full control over speed, this is a versatile, state-of-the-art tremolo effect.

Budget Buy
EHX STEREO PULSAR
- **PRICE** £76
- **CONTACT** ehx.com

TEST PILOTS CHASE BLISS AUDIO TONAL RECALL

PAUL GREGORY takes delivery of this super-spec'd analogue delay and disappears down the rabbit hole. Will he ever escape?

Paul Gregory
- **TEST GEAR** Chase Bliss Audio Tonal Recall
- **PRICE** £399
- **BAND** Lanterns On The Lake
- **MAIN GUITARS, AMPS & PEDALS USED** Eastwood Airline Coronado, Eastwood Airline H77, Epiphone Dot, Fender ML Hot Rod DeVille 212, Motion Custom Works 4G8B1, EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run, DigiTech Digiverb, DigiTech Digidelay, Line 6 DL4, Electro-Harmonix Micro Pog, Way Huge Green Rhino MK4, Dunlop DVP1, Fredric Effects Green Russian

In my experience, I tend to think of pedals like this: there are some that can provide instant musical happiness as soon as the box is opened and the pedal is on the floor. The kind of pedal where any notion of reading an accompanying instruction manual is both unnecessary and moderately hilarious. Before you've had a chance to notice what colour the LEDs are, the sounds emanating from the box already feel as if they will eventually become music, and you're safe in the knowledge that the biggest test it can give you is deciding which foot to turn it on and off with.

Then there are some pedals that require a bit of 'mild reading', perhaps a quick once over of the manual, just to get your bearings, y'know... 'turned it on, nothing happened, oops, it's because I was stomping on the tap tempo', etc.

There is a third kind of pedal, the type of pedal that after three hours of continuous noodling has sounded different every 37 seconds and caused your brain to fall out of your nose, reducing you to a crumpled heap on the floor crying endlessly. I digress somewhat; however, the Chase Bliss Audio Tonal Recall (exceptional name) falls into... well all three of these categories.

Firstly, it's a beautiful-looking thing. I mean really. It comes in a rather fetching blue-tinged wooden box complete with gold latch. It feels like opening a gift from a 17th century European monarch, and even smells nice. The pedal itself is a brushed aluminium affair, with the coolest logo ever. Plonked onto my pedalboard, it looks like a very serious piece of equipment – the control surface is quite daunting.

The Tonal Recall is a digitally controlled analogue delay, so the controls you'd expect are present – such as time, mix and regen (repeats) – as well as controls for modulation, such as depth and rate. It's all the other stuff that made me begin to whimper with fear. On the top of the pedal, there are 16 DIP switches, which control all sorts of

The tone (ramp) control acts as a low-pass tone filter for the repeats. The ramping can be set to control mix, rate, time, regen or depth using the DIP switches

The S/L/B toggle switch dictates how many chips your delayed signal passes through. S equals short, L is long and B stands for both

No fewer than 16 top-mounted DIP switches give you extra control over features such as momentary mode, trails and expression pedal settings

The waveform switch has three options: triangle, sine and square

Inside, a pair of reissued MN3005 bucket-brigade delay chips give the Tonal Recall its analogue sound, while digital control offers enormous scope

parameters. This pedal has the steepest learning curve I've ever encountered. In short, you have to read the manual.

Fortunately, the manual is brilliant, to the point and easy to read, it's just that you need to read it lots and lots of times. That's not to say when first plugged in it doesn't sound great, because it absolutely does. I used to have a very, very old Boss DM2, and on the short setting it's very reminiscent of that; my first impression of the long setting is that it reminds me of an EHX Deluxe Memory Man. I like analogue delay at the very start of my effects chain – so guitar, then analogue delay, then fuzzy things, followed by digital delay/reverb, etc. It sounds glorious for that analogue 'just behind the scene' kind of thickening effect, and the tap tempo is flawless. Turned up for huge squalling noise it excels, the tone control allowing the repeats to brighten or darken, though even at its brightest the repeats are still dark and grainy, as analogue delay should be.

It sounds glorious for that analogue 'just behind the scene' thickening effect, and the tap tempo is flawless

The Tonal Recall is capable of things I've never heard of, and despite reading the manual several times, and setting up the pedal countless ways, there are still huge amounts of stuff I absolutely do not understand about this thing. Therefore, at first the prospect of using this pedal in a band context was a little perplexing. In total, there are 28 controls to fiddle with – on an analogue delay platform this is mind boggling, and also quite a challenge to remember how things were set and quickly recall them for a song. You could spend days messing around and it wouldn't sound the same twice.

Fortunately, and I must say my left-handed northern mind was blown by this feature, you can save presets – only two presets, but presets nonetheless – on an analogue delay! That is unbelievably useful. Once I found something I liked, I saved it to a preset for use as a base sound, and it's super-quick to do so. When you flick to the preset, all the controls are still active, so you can change stuff on the fly – which is amazing.

Using this pedal is a combination of confusion and wonder. It does things nothing else does, and feels like it requires a short attendance at a physics seminar to fully understand how to use it.

It's the core sound that matters, however, and the core sound on the Tonal Recall is amazing – once you work out how you want to use it and save the presets, you begin to forget about all those switches. Then I plugged in the expression pedal... more on that next time.

LunaStone Three Stage Rocket & The Pusher

Fresh from Copenhagen, a three-in-one gain machine and a titchy one-knob booster – **RICHARD PURVIS** goes walkies with a couple of great Danes

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Three Stage Rocket

Going one up on the LunaStone by adding a compressor to its two drives and a booster is the **Keeley Tone Workstation £299**. If one overdrive with a switchable boost will do, try the **Ibanez TS808DX £199** or the high-gain **Seymour Duncan Palladium £395**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The Pusher

Other highly rated clean boosters in miniature enclosures include the **Keeley Katana Mini £99** and **Xotic EP Booster £143**. Going up a notch in size, the **Seymour Duncan Killing Floor £210** is a powerful full-range boost pedal with switchable treble lift.

Scientists estimate that in our galaxy alone there are more than five billion different overdrive pedals, and that at least three billion of them claim to be more transparent than the others. It's a competitive field – clearly, lots of people are looking for a box that creates natural drive without adding too much colour to their tone. Danish guitarist Soren Andersen is one of them... or at least, he was until he got together with his local boutique stompbox maker, LunaStone, to design the Three Stage Rocket.

But this hefty black brick is about versatility as much as it is about tone. The name comes from its three distinct gain stages: two switchable overdrives – one much hairier than the other – plus a separate boost circuit that can be engaged before or after the dirt, or on its own. We make that seven possible combinations in total. It's made in Denmark, and the grey squiggle on the enclosure is Andersen's signature.

Now hold up, cowboy – there's another LunaStone pedal before us today, one that's so tiny we almost missed it. The Pusher comes from that new school of stompboxes too small even to fit in a battery, so you'll need a standard 9v mains supply to fuel it. It's a single-knob clean boost pedal with up to 15dB on tap – which is way less than some, but surely as much as most of us will ever need.

Company boss Steen Grontved gushes at length on the LunaStone website about how much better his clean boost is than all the others. Well, we refer you to the first sentence of this review... but he does give some detail: it's not a pedal for boosting the whole signal, but for "enhancing and focusing the tonal spectrum where your guitar lives". So it's not all about the bass, or the mids, or the treble, or everything at once – it's about making your guitar sound better as well as louder. We don't mind a bit of that.

In use

It doesn't take long to work out that the Three Stage Rocket lives, broadly speaking, in Tube Screamer territory. Overdrive 1 with the gain set low offers a gentle scuzzing up of the bypass tone, while flattening out the transient spikes and thinning out the bottom end; unlike

a classic TS type, however, there isn't much of a hump in the upper-mids to compensate for what's been taken out. We can certainly call this a semi-transparent overdrive, then. Pushing the gain past halfway gets the fires roaring, and it's noticeable now that the midrange does begin to get more assertive – the phrase lodging in our heads is 'classic rock'.

OD2 picks up close to where OD1 left off – the two channels sound just about identical with this one at 10 o'clock and the first at 1 o'clock. Beyond there, we're accelerating into pure metal, but it remains touch-sensitive and the fundamentally civilised character of the drive never strays into harshness. You could easily call the two channels 'rhythm' and 'lead', but the presence of an additional boost switch might change the way you approach that dynamic.

The boost is a simple but hugely useful addition to the unit: on its own, it's full and meaty; set before the overdrive, it pumps a load of extra gain into the circuit without affecting the output level much; set after the overdrive, it just slams the whole thing into your amp that much harder.

This gives us a handy reference point for The Pusher, which is also controlled by a single cream chickenhead and promises us the same degree of boost. It certainly doesn't sound the same, though. Where the Three Stage Rocket's boost circuit ramps up the level across the board, the standalone unit is more concerned with clarity and bite. It's not exactly a treble booster, but there's more going on at the top end than at the bottom – and what's going on is a super-sweet kind of sparkle that makes this a difficult pedal to switch off.

There's no arguing with the way The Pusher goes about livening up your tone, as well as simply making it louder

It might be nice to have one or two settings to tweak apart from the boost level, but there's no arguing with the way this thing goes about its business of livening up your tone (as well as simply making it louder). If you have muddy humbuckers that need a lift, or just want to perk up your signal on its way out of a chain of unbuffered effects, a light coating of Pusher polish might be just the thing.

KEY FEATURES

Three Stage Rocket

- **PRICE** £269
- **DESCRIPTION** Dual overdrive and boost pedal, made in Denmark
- **CONTROLS** Boost level and pre/post switch, output level, tone, gain OD1 and gain OD2; boost bypass, OD1/2 and drive bypass footswitches
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 187x122x54mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 2624 1136 (Denmark)
  lunastonepedals.com
  audiodistributiongroup.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Two levels of natural overdrive
+ Nice chunky boost with useful pre/post switching
– Shame you can't voice the two channels differently

If you like TS-style overdrive without the snarl, this might be the only stompbox you need

8/10

KEY FEATURES

The Pusher

- **PRICE** £89
- **DESCRIPTION** Boost pedal, made in Denmark
- **CONTROLS** Boost level, bypass footswitch
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 92x44x49mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A simple, effective and compact booster
+ Works well as an always-on treble enhancer
– No room for a battery

A fine amp-shover, and a practical and affordable way to add sparkle to your clean tones

9/10

Death By Audio Waveformer Destroyer, Echo Dream 2 & Interstellar Overdriver

The clue's in the name... **RICHARD PURVIS** adopts the brace position and prepares for a triple hit of notorious noisemongering

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Waveformer Destroyer

The daddy of all lunatic filth generators is the **Z.Vex Fuzz Factory**, starting at **£189**.

Echo Dream 2

The obvious reference point is the **Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man £186**, but also try the **Jam Pedals Delay Llama Supreme £329**. None of these does the fuzz part, though.

Interstellar Overdriver

Other overdrives offering a broadly similar kind of 'chunkiness' include the **Supro Drive £209** and **Electro-Harmonix Germanium OD £66**.

Death By Audio prides itself on not being like other stompbox makers. The company refers to itself as a 'collective' rather than a company, it has a lo-fi punk aesthetic that can make parts of its website quite a challenge to read, and it names its pedals using words such as 'war', 'destroyer' and 'apocalypse'. Death By Audio are not your go-to guys if you're looking for a blues-y booster.

The three pedals on test here provide a decent sample of the company's current Brooklyn-built range: we have a fuzzbox that's capable of some seriously savage tones, a delay with built-in fuzz and crazy modulation, and – as an antidote to all that sonic extremism – a simple two-knob overdrive. Mind you, as we'll soon see, that one gets pretty fiery, too, when you crank it...

Waveformer Destroyer

Four footswitches and one knob? This is no ordinary fuzz. In fact, the Waveformer Destroyer has more controls on the inside than on the top – unscrew the baseplate and you'll see a row of eight DIP switches. The first two change the basic filthiness of the whole pedal, while the other six operate in three pairs – each pair altering the part of the circuit engaged by a different footswitch.

What do those footswitches do? Filter is fairly self-explanatory, offering some alternative EQ profiles. Blast is described by DBA as the 'insanity switch', but just how insane depends on how you set its two DIP switches; and Boost makes the whole thing louder, with optional emphasis on the treble or bass. Don't worry if this is all a little confusing – the trick is just to turn it on and start messing about.

In use

We spent our first couple of hours using this pedal with the baseplate off, which feels horribly wrong; but if you're going to be flipping it over to try a different combination of settings every five minutes, it's really the only way. Once you've found a combination that works for you, the plate can go back on and stay there.

Of course, you could just stick with the default factory settings – and they're spectacular. With just the main circuit engaged, it's a big, smooth, instantly likeable fuzz. Stomp on

the filter switch and you get an aggressively mid-scooped version, while Blast pushes things further again with a spluttery voltage-starved effect. Boost adds a large bucket of oomph to the whole thing, and the only problem at this point is that you've been getting steadily louder at every step – and a single master volume control isn't going to help you match up the output levels of all these different fuzz tones.

The DIP switches can do more stuff than we have room to list here – make the basic sound cleaner, the filtered sound grungier, the boosted sound deeper – and the total number of possible combinations you're now opening up is bewilderingly high (around 500, someone less busy than us has calculated). We wouldn't blame you for spending three months playing around with this pedal before you even take it to a rehearsal, never mind a gig.

Echo Dream 2

Think of a delay pedal that adds modulation to its scuzzily decaying repeats and you're almost certainly looking at the Deluxe Memory Man, or one of its proudly analogue variants. The digital Echo Dream 2 wants you to stop looking over there and look over here, where you'll find much more intense modulation – which can be switched to a square shape instead of a normal curve – plus an in-built overdrive/fuzz circuit and a 'wet only' option that kills your original signal. Delay time from the PT2399 chip runs from 20ms to just over a second, and it will self-oscillate with the feedback dial past halfway.

In use

Are we allowed to get a 'normal' delay sound from this thing? Of course we are, and very nice it is too – coming complete with shaky, warbly, hissy imperfections. The jumbo-sized time knob makes fine tweaks easy, while adding just a touch of overdrive – around nine o'clock on the fuzz control – has a very pleasing effect on the overall tone, bringing in a shadow of sweet, uncoloured crunch. Cranking the fuzz turns this delay into a full-on grunge machine, and it's a well-balanced sound that's good enough to enjoy with the delay off – so you really are getting two effects in one. The really zany stuff happens in the modulation section. Turn the depth above minimum and the pitch-shifting of the repeats is clearly audible; using the square shape with the depth at maximum, you'll hear them jumping from a tone above the dry signal to a tone below. It's not an effect you'll want to overdo, but it's fun.

Cranking the fuzz turns this delay pedal into a full-on grunge machine, and it's a well-balanced sound

Interstellar Overdriver

The name suggests something spacey and sci-fi, but in theory this is by far the most conventional unit of the bunch. It does low-gain overdrive, and then it does high-gain overdrive. The end.

But we know enough about DBA by now to be confident that this isn't going to be just a Tube Screamer clone. The original incarnation of the pedal, without a volume control, has been around a few years, and we're sure there's going to be something worthwhile going on inside that defiantly monochrome box.

In use

Easing ourselves in with the drive turned down to minimum, this is about as close as Death By Audio is ever going to get to a clean boost. What comes out is only marginally more feisty than the bypass tone, with some added bite in the upper-mids – it could almost be a Screamer after all. By the time we've wound the drive up to 10 o'clock, however, the crunch is coming through thicker and it's beginning to feel more natural and amp-like. Don't tell anyone, but this thing is really rather tasteful.

Beyond noon, the overdrive becomes ever more rich and chunky, but it's still fundamentally a neutral, touch-sensitive drive – and one that cleans up magically with a flick of the guitar's volume control. Only when we're close to maximum gain do the high frequencies really start to get squeezed out in favour of fat, fuzzy mids. It's not 'extreme', but it is extremely nice.

KEY FEATURES

Waveformer Destroyer

- **PRICE** £189
- **DESCRIPTION** Multi-mode fuzz pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Master volume; footswitches for bypass, filter, blast and boost; eight internal DIP switches for circuit tuning
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 144x118x56mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Thick, sweet, wall-shaking fuzz
+ Four different sounds at your feet...
+ ...and hundreds more, if you want them, via the internal switches

- No way to control individual output levels

This could easily replace several other fuzzes in your collection

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Echo Dream 2

- **PRICE** £215
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital delay and overdrive/fuzz pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Master volume, fuzz, delay level, time, feedback and wet-only switch; modulation speed, depth and curved/square switch; bypass footswitch
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 144x118x56mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Classic analogue-style delay sounds
+ Plenty of control over modulation
+ Overdrive/fuzz sounds great by itself

- Extreme modulation settings may be of limited real use

An enjoyably fruity delay with a tidy fuzzbox hiding in the basement

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Interstellar Overdriver

- **PRICE** £135
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Master volume, overdrive
- **FEATURES** True bypass, powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 118x93x58mm
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **coda-music.com** **deathbyaudio.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great for meaty low-gain crunch
+ Controlled and musical when driven
+ About the coolest-looking overdrive you can buy

- For such a maverick brand, it's surprisingly 'normal'

It doesn't do anything scary, but this is still a top-notch drive pedal

8/10

EarthQuaker Devices Space Spiral

Space is the place for the prolific producers of out-there effects at EarthQuaker Devices. **GARY WALKER** goes into orbit aboard the Space Spiral

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £205
- **DESCRIPTION** Modulated delay with delay times from 30-600ms
- **CONTROLS** Time, repeats, mix, depth, shape, rate
- **FEATURES** Powered by 9V DC power supply; analogue dry signal path with true bypass switching
- **DIMENSIONS** 117x63.5x57.15mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 6574 8228 **earthquakerdevices.com audiodistributiongroup.com**

After taking us on a maiden interstellar flight with the Transmisser modulated reverb, EarthQuaker Devices is again preparing for blast-off with the Space Spiral, described by the Akron, Ohio kings of crazy as "a dark and dreamy modulated delay designed to take you across the highways of fantasy".

What we mere earth-dwellers get is a lo-fi digital delay built using a processor from a "cheap karaoke machine", with a separate modulation section. Controls are simple and easy to use, divided into two logical rows: delay up top, modulation below. Delay time ranges from 30-600ms, taking you from tight slapback to long grainy repeats that will be ample for cosmic soundscapers. The repeats build toward self-oscillation once you pass 3pm – more on that later. Mix does what it says on the tin. The modulation controls are similarly self-explanatory, with depth dictating the amount of modulation, shape swinging between a gentle triangle and a sharp square wave, and rate increasing the speed of the modulation.

In use

First things first: if you're turning on this pedal in a dark rehearsal room or on stage, have your sunglasses ready. Looking into the single white LED is akin to entering a staring competition with the sun. It's retina-scorchingly bright.

Starting with the delay in isolation, this is not a pristine digital sound. The repeats degrade in a wonderfully musical way with nice scratchy artefacts piling up beneath your playing. Fans of tape echo and old oil can delay sounds will be very much at home here.

Crank the repeats and lovers of self-oscillation are also well catered for. With the time set at minimum, it results in an alien death ray sound, while at the other end of the time scale it's huge and immersive. However, once again we find ourselves wishing for an expression pedal input, or failing that something similar to the Havoc switch utilised to instantly max out the repeats on the excellent Caroline Kilobyte – *G&B*'s favourite delay of 2016.

So far, so very usable nice-sounding delay pedal, then, with more than enough sounds to play with before we even engage the modulation. And that's when things start to get weird.

With the shape set at triangle and the depth low, the Space Spiral yields a luscious chorus sound. Push the depth past noon, and it's possible to get something akin to a Leslie speaker. Up the rate and set the shape to square and things take a turn for the bizarre. In this setting, with the delay in slapback mode, it sounds like a panic attack in a lift. There are a whole range of wacky sounds to be found by tweaking the shape, depth and rate controls, but it's the kind of stuff that many players may use only once in a set – if that.

Of course, it will depend largely on what you want to use the Space Spiral for, but for this reviewer it's a pedal that works best used sparingly.

We found a beautiful place with the repeats and time at 1pm and the mix at halfway with the modulation depth a shade above minimum, the shape fully in square wave territory and the rate at 2pm. The gentle modulation lends a lovely weathered warble to proceedings. Using our Gretsch Players Edition Tennessee Rose on the bridge pickup, with a smidgeon of dirt from a J Rocket Archer into a clean Fender amp with plenty of spring reverb it's heavenly stuff. The repeats decay in a deliciously crunchy fashion, and it's a truly musical effect.

We had great fun, yet experienced a degree of frustration with the Space Spiral, discovering some really out-there sounds and trying to find practical uses for them. It may seem perverse that the thing we like best about this creative stompbox is using it subtly as an orthodox tape delay. But it sounds glorious, and the fact that it can produce both traditional sounds that will please tonal purists and utterly bizarre noises that will have them reaching for the Anadin makes it another boundary-pushing winner from EarthQuaker. What will these clever space cadets come up with next?

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **EHX Deluxe Memory Man £206** is the big daddy of modulated delays and costs only £1 more than the Space Spiral. The **Caroline Kilobyte £199** has the excellent Havoc switch.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Lovely analogue-sounding repeats
+ A range of creative modulation effects
+ Easy to dial in and control

- Some delay fans may want longer times
- No expression pedal control

A great lo-fi pedal with bags of modulated delay sounds, but perhaps a bit of a niche effect for some players

7/10

Why I love...

FUZZ

By Dan Patlansky

My favourite guitar pedal is without a doubt a fuzz. I think a fuzz has so many different voices, depending on where the volume knob is on your guitar. It's the pedal I use most to explore different tonal textures. I think most people just plug a fuzz in with full taps on the volume – definitely worth exploring this vast world. Some of the best clean tones I've heard are fuzzes rolled back – sometimes, they can have an overdrive quality to them. Regarding the brand or type of fuzz, that's a difficult one because I still have never played the perfect fuzz. The closest I've heard is the British-made SM (Scott McKeon) Fuzz, and it's next on my shopping list. Because of this unhealthy addiction, my store room is littered with fuzz pedals that sounded great in the store but didn't quite work out on my board. My current fuzz was built for me by my clever friend, Joel. It's called Fuzz Version 5.

BUILDER PROFILE

ThorpyFX

GARY WALKER speaks to a rising star of the British stompbox scene who knows a thing or two about bomb-proof build quality...

British Army Major and explosive ordnance disposal expert Adrian Thorpe MBE set up ThorpyFX in 2014 and has consistently wowed us with his high-quality handmade creations. The Gunshot Overdrive, Fallout Cloud fuzz and Warthog overdrive/distortion all landed *G&B* Choice awards, with the Peacekeeper low-gain drive also impressing. Since then, Adrian's added the Chain Home tremolo to his range, and we have no doubt that he'll continue to impress us throughout 2017.

Q Your route to becoming a pedal maker was far from typical. How did you come to be involved in the world of guitar effects?

"When I first commissioned into the Army, I found myself living away from home with a lot of spare time, so I started to experiment with buying pedals and it quickly became an obsession. I was trying all sorts of pedals, but I was desperate to nail the vintage tones of Brian May, Eric Clapton and Tony Iommi. All three legends seemed to share the same secret, the Dallas Rangemaster! So I decided to build one. I sourced all of the parts, including the OC44 transistor, vintage caps, etc. I was blown away by the result! This started a different obsession – I wanted to build as many circuits as I could. Quickly, I built up a massive amount of self-built pedals, so I started getting requests from friends to build certain circuits. Eventually, the pressure to build my own designs became too strong an urge to resist, so the day after our wedding Georgia and I agreed to start ThorpyFX."

Q The components in your pedals and the workmanship are of a consistently high grade. Is that a key part of ThorpyFX's ethos?

"Well, I am obsessive over details. I like to 'sweat the small stuff'. Bearing that in mind, I wanted to ensure my pedals were as well built and consistent between units as they could be. To do this involved using basic engineering principles, one of which was to reduce variation between units by narrowing the percentage difference between components. I also wanted to reduce the noise floor of the circuits to ensure the effect isn't covered in a wash of hiss. This sort of attention to detail doesn't come cheap, however it is worth it for me and it's something I will not compromise on at all. If the pedal design doesn't meet my exacting standards, then I will not release it."

Q Talk us through the ThorpyFX range...

"We currently have five pedals. The Gunshot was our first pedal and is our take on a British-style drive. It's articulate, mid-focused and amp-like, owing to the cascading gain stages. The Warthog has similar cascading drive stages to the Gunshot, but has a more American tonality. It can get a lot dirtier, and a lot cleaner than the Gunshot. The Fallout Cloud is our take on a four-transistor silicon fuzz, but with a much more powerful active EQ. The Peacekeeper is our take on a low-gain overdrive and has a split active EQ with the mids/presence control sat pre-drive and the bass and treble post-drive. The Chain Home is our latest offering and is our take on the vintage Vox Repeat Percussion tremolo circuit, coupled with an amazingly versatile booster."

Q The Fallout Cloud has been immensely popular. It's designed to overcome some of the frustrations we all experience with many fuzz pedals. Is it your biggest achievement?

"I'd say so yes. It's our flagship pedal, it has been universally praised and has won awards on both sides of the pond; we are massively humbled and grateful to our customer base. We had a real eureka moment when we managed to get the EQ we wanted to solve all the shortcomings of that style of fuzz. The best bit, though, was when I was able to set the EQ to match the vintage unit I had to test against, I genuinely couldn't stop playing the thing! Thankfully, thousands of the guitar-playing community share the same joy with this pedal as I do."

Q We really like the Warthog, and it reminds us of a ProCo Rat, but crucially it doesn't sag and disappear in a band mix. How did you achieve that?

"A vintage Rat is a joyous pedal to behold, but I found the compression within somewhat frustrating. The Warthog utilises some of the same ideas, but it's designed to be a lot more open. I have done this by reducing the gain in the overdrive section and designing the clipping circuit to have much higher headroom. The Warthog also has a cascading gain arrangement similar to the Gunshot. This means that despite the lower gain in the drive section, adding the calibre (up to 25dB of boost) increases the distortion available, but allows the circuit to remain open. Doing things this way means the Warthog can go from a clean boost all the way through overdrive, distortion and into fuzz territory. The end result is probably one of the most versatile pedals on the market and it sounds stellar in a band situation, too."

Q What inspired you to make a tremolo?

"I'd been listening to a lot of Spacemen 3 and wanted to get that interesting tremolo sound, but didn't want to clone anything that had already been done. So the Chain Home was a nod to the vintage circuit, but wrapped around a really fantastic clean booster. This means you can get some subtle trem wash sounds and give your amp a kick in the backside, too – unusual for a tremolo as they often seem to lower the perceived volume of your signal. I also wanted to give people a solution if pedalboard real estate is an issue."

Q Tell us about the collaboration with Dan Coggins...

"I've been great friends with Dan [designer of Lovetone pedals] for years. Over the summer of 2016, we got together and collaborated on a number of modulation designs. These are going to be unique takes on classic analogue modulation effects like chorus, flange, phase, etc. I am in the final stages of getting these nailed down so that I can be 100 per cent happy to release them."

IN ASSOCIATION WITH Reverb

Vintage TIME MACHINES

BOSS DM-1 DELAY MACHINE

The classic three-knob DM-1 was produced for only one year, and this example is in near-mint condition. Time to snap it up...

While the image of a Boss three-knob analogue delay pedal usually relates to the iconic DM-2 and DM-3, it's easy to forget about the rarely seen original: the DM-1. One of the last of Boss's large-format pedals produced before the introduction of the compact series, the DM-1 was made for only one year, from 1978 to 1979.

Consisting of three knobs for delay time, intensity and balance, the DM-1 was unique for incorporating a CCD (charged-couple device) circuit. More conventionally known for its use in photocopiers and camera technology, the CCD chip provided the DM-1 with a distinctively bright, clipped delay, which darkened and reverberated at longer repeats.

In addition to the CCD, this tank of an effect was notable for its inclusion of input pads. Most non-tape delays were intended as dedicated guitar effects, but the DM-1's three-stage input level made it a more versatile utility player in the studio.

This pristine specimen comes from Soundgas in Matlock. Clocking in at a Price Guide range of £290-£460, this particularly clean model fetches a somewhat higher price for its well preserved quality. As a vintage speciality shop, Soundgas is known for its revolving stock of finely curated vintage effects and studio pieces, including one of the world's best selections of vintage tape delay units, so it's safe to say that the staff there know a bit about landing an excellent delay pedal.

For vintage pedal enthusiasts, an original DM-1 is an obvious addition to any collection. But this old-school pedal is more than just a collector's curio. It offers something distinct from more common BBD-based units, and is a worthy pedal to consider for any tonal explorer. While it didn't revolutionise delay in the same way the CE-1 revolutionised chorus, this vintage heavy hitter laid the groundwork for generations of delay pedals to follow.

VITAL STATISTICS

Boss DM-1 Delay Machine

- **PRICE** £540
- **YEAR** 1978-79
- **SELLER** Reverb.com/soundgas
- **SEE MORE** reverb.com/uk

Six of the best

A sextet of futuristic-sounding effects pedals that will either propel your guitar to a new frontier of sonic possibility or make it sound like a deranged robot...

Perhaps you're a guitarist who plays in a band with an electronic aspect to its sound; perhaps you want to use your guitar to add some organic atmospherics to a piece of soundtrack work; or perhaps you're a compulsive knob-twiddler attracted to the more experimental end of the sonic spectrum. Whichever it is, there's no shortage of sonic adventures to be had in the guitar world, courtesy of those pioneering people at boutique FX companies – mostly in lab coats, mostly in underground lairs, many of whom haven't slept for weeks on end – beavering away in the darkness to bring us their latest sophisticated box of sonic mystery. Here are six of our favourite recently released exotic sound manipulators with a science-fiction flavour...

Death By Audio Reverberation Machine

PRICE £199 **CONTACT** www.deathbyaudio.com

Williamsburg, NY effects maker Death By Audio's entire product line could be featured here – but we've singled out the Reverberation Machine for its uncanny ability to add an inspiring sheen of ghostly shimmer and ethereal ambience to any guitar part. It does this via just four basic controls (volume, altitude, reverb tone and bright sun/dark star modes); the altitude control alters the reverb's gain and can generate a range of tones, from barely perceptible smooth sheen to crunchy and destructive echos. It's also capable of sweeter sounds as well as white-noise drenched atmospheres – this is a very musical-sounding tool and a dream ticket for any knob-twiddling reverb junkie.

USE IT FOR...
Adding unexpected character and life to your guitar parts

USE IT FOR...
Turning any guitar part inside out

Red Panda Particle Granular Delay

PRICE £279 **CONTACT** www.redpandalab.com

The Particle takes your guitar signal, chops it up using the techniques of granular synthesis in real time, then does a range of what Red Panda terms "trippy, robotic things" to it. It creates interactions between three pitch modes – detune, density and LFO – and five delay modes – random, density, LFO, random pitch and reverse. These then act on the grains, whose size you can also adjust, and the resulting sounds can fall anywhere from modulated delay shimmers to reverse and stutter effects, to extreme glitchy rhythms, to indescribable, kaleidoscopic pitch-shifted alien modulation patterns... It's an extremely powerful and endlessly creative toolbox.

Rainger FX Dr Freakenstein Dwarf Bleep (and Igor mini-pedal)

PRICE £99 **CONTACT** www.raingerfx.com

There are plenty of futuristic fuzzes, but the Dwarf Bleep is different – mainly because of Igor, a mini pressure-operated foot controller that has two modes, both of which produce futuristic sound-mangling results. The main chassis (tiny, with entirely top-mounted sockets) has a volume thumbwheel, a footswitch for toggling hi or lo intensity mode and a dial to control the harmonic overtones of the fuzzy distortion. Engaging Igor enables you to alter pitch and create bitcrusher-style sounds, high-pass filter sweeps and real-time pitch variations, resulting in creative rhythmic possibilities for riffs and synthetic robotic noise.

Keeley Dark Side

PRICE £299 **CONTACT** www.robertkeeley.com

Across *Dark Side Of The Moon*, *Wish You Were Here* and *Animals*, Pink Floyd's David Gilmour soundtracked 70s sonic space exploration with a variety of signature sounds based on a shedload of effects units – and, of course, his inimitable touch and tone. Robert Keeley's latest artist-based multi-FX unit promises to place Gilmour's sounds at your fingertips, via the Dark Side – effectively a two-section pedal with fuzz on one side and modulation/delay on the other. The fuzz presents a range of Big Muff-style tones with a three-way midrange EQ switch for variety. The modulation consists of emulations of signature Floyd effects – flanger, phase, rotary and U-Vibe – and 12 different flavours of Binson Echorec-style tape delay.

USE IT FOR...
Losing yourself on the prog side of the moon

Chase Bliss Audio Warped Vinyl mkII

PRICE $349 **CONTACT** www.chaseblissaudio.com

Boasting an all-analogue signal path, a quiet circuit and 'true pitch', this boutique pedal offers comprehensive digital control over vibrato and chorus sounds, as well as the ability to save settings and alter the shape of the modulation waveform. A ramp control modulates every other parameter over time – and a series of DIP switches on the top of the unit enable you to choose which parameters are affected, turning them on or off, or enabling them to rise or fall. This results in a library of unique modulations, warbles, gargles and pitch-based effects, as well as fully controllable versions of classic vibrato and chorus effects into the bargain.

USE IT FOR...
Adding an otherworldly, under-sea shimmer to an arpeggio part or chord sequence

USE IT FOR...
Adding a dash of controlled chaos to distorted riffs and lead parts

Hologram Electronics Dream Sequence

PRICE $425 **CONTACT** www.hologramelectronics.com

Octaves, envelope filtering, sample and hold, arpeggiation and sequencing combine in the Dream Sequence, the debut pedal from Knoxville's Hologram Electronics. The Space Age-style chassis houses a range of preset octave up and down sequenced patterns, with additional control over pitch-shifting and rhythmic timing, the shape of the ADSR envelope and much more. It has expression pedal and MIDI control and you can record and save sequences – basically, it's an effects unit that blurs the line between programmed-sounding sequences and instant guitar-effect gratification. The company's forthcoming Infinite Jets – a four-in-one resynthesiser pedal – is an altogether more direct and glitchier affair, but the Dream Sequence is just the job for everything from hallucinatory frozen chords and atmospheric drones to rhythmic, synth-like arpeggiation and creative modulations.

USE IT FOR...
Building scene-stealing riffs with unique rhythmic patterns

BUILDER PROFILE

Two notes Audio Engineering

The clever folk at Two notes are solving some age-old problems for amp purists. **GARY WALKER** meets the main man

Two notes was formed in 2008 in the south of France, with the aim of addressing a problem so many guitarists wrestle with – getting the sound of a cranked analogue valve amp and a board stocked with studio-grade pedals without provoking the neighbours into calling in environmental health to investigate the ungodly noise we're making. For most players, the alternative solution – digital modelling amps – often falls short, and so after four years of exhaustive research Two notes founder Guillaume Pille released the Torpedo VB-101, essentially a DI, power attenuator and cab sim in a single box, with the aim of reproducing the full power and tone of a valve amp at headphone-friendly volume levels for direct recording. Pille didn't stop there, and the company now has a wide and varied range of products, including the Le Preamp series of pedals released in 2016. We caught up with Guillaume to discuss the vision behind the company.

Q Tell us a little bit about the evolution of Two notes

"I founded OROSYS and our brand Two notes Audio Engineering in 2008. At the end of my PhD studies in electronics and optics, I came up with a concept that I had had in mind for some time, developing the first Torpedo product (VB-101), simply because I needed a solution to record my own tube amp at home. I couldn't settle either for a modelling amp/plugin or analogue speaker sim – let's face it, despite amp modelling getting better, we all know that nothing still 'feels' like the real thing. So, after three years of intensive research on various speaker simulation algorithms, the Torpedo VB-101 was born. Since then, we have released different hardware and software versions of our concept of a digital loadbox, an analogue circuit replicating a speaker cabinet electrical load, plus a digital speaker simulation."

Q Talk us through the current range

"Last year, because we couldn't find preamps in a pedal format that would suit our own needs, we decided to create four models to cover the basic tones that guitarists and bassists want. The Torpedo C.A.B. had already been on the market for a couple of years, but many users complained they couldn't find their tone with just effects pedals and the few real preamps on the market. Plus, we wanted to be able to control with MIDI the Torpedo C.A.B. and possibly other MIDI effects, without the need of an extra looper/switcher. They have two channels, plus a combination of the two, which we call Fusion. The A channel is always 'clean', but on Le Crunch for example you can push the A gain and get some nice, mid-freq distortion. Channel B is the dirty one, from slightly distorted (Le Clean) to frankly saturated (Le Lead). Fusion can be Cold (A and B are in parallel) or Hot (A and B are cascaded). That way, you can either mix clean and dirty sounds in the Cold mode (a famous studio trick to bring back more dynamics in a too-compressed dirty sound for example) or push the B channel even more by using A as a simple boost with EQ. Bassists love the fact that it doesn't sound like most solid-state DI units out there, but more like a real tube bass amp – one that you can push without suffering the consequences. All models come with our Torpedo Wall of Sound III plugin. You can record a guitar or bass track going out of a preamp direct into your DAW, then insert the WoS III plugin to access some of the very best speaker simulations on the market. WoS III can be seen as the software version of the Torpedo hardware series, it's actually very similar to the Torpedo Studio in terms of functionalities."

Q What have been your biggest success stories?

"Our most successful current product is the Torpedo Live. It's a simpler version of the Torpedo Studio, with just what you need to go on tour with your own tube amp, without worrying about damaging the output or mic'ing up a cabinet. Thousands of Torpedo Live units are either sitting on a studio desk or out there touring with some pretty major artists, because they work equally well for both the guitar/bass addict who records or just wants to use their amp quietly

at home and pro-level touring musicians. Regarding success stories, it could be all the great artists we work with in so many musical genres. But I'd rather talk about that time when a user of a Torpedo Studio called to tell us that he was so happy that he didn't have to buy a house, because the Torpedo Studio would silence his amp and he could just stay in an apartment. Or that other guy whose wife let him come back to the house after playing for years in the basement!"

Q What practical applications are your pedals best suited to?

"The Le Preamp pedals are preamplifiers. In other words, they are the first amplification stage that a guitar/bass signal will encounter. This is where a huge part of the final tone is forged and tweaked with gain and EQ. A preamp can be used with a power amp and a cabinet, but also to feed the front-of-house mixer or record at home. In case it is used direct, we provide a DI out with an analogue speaker sim; and for the studio, a version of our Torpedo WoS III plugin to take care of the cab sim and mic'ing. You can also plug the preamp in front of your amp, but in that case some more tweaking is needed – the preamp voicing is not really designed for that application. I'd recommend lowering the bass and treble as a start.

"I believe that the need for smaller and lighter systems has always been there. However, with the progress of PA systems having higher fidelity, lightweight power amplification, amp modelling both in analogue and digital, we now have serious challengers for the traditional tube amps/large speaker cabs that we all love, but hate as soon as it needs maintenance or when we need to carry it around. With the Torpedo series, we offer the possibility not to bring your heavy cabinet on stage, while keeping your favoured tube amp. With Le Preamp series, though, you can have a real and good tube sound that just fits on a pedalboard! Of course, you can use the pedals like any preamp, with a good power amp and a good speaker cabinet. But I believe that the majority of the current users of our pedals just put them on a pedalboard and go direct to a mixer on stage. We use a MIDI connection between the preamps. If you have several units, they act together like the different channels of an amp: one preamp will be passed as soon as another is activated and vice-versa."

"Let's face it – despite amp modelling getting better, we all know that still nothing 'feels' like the real thing"

Q Your pedals can also be used to make the home recording process easier...

"We like products that are fast and easy to set up. There are plenty of good digital modelling applications nowadays, but it's sometimes so much easier to tweak just a few knobs and be happy right away with your tone, without the need to search forever for an extra little something. You plug your guitar and FX pedals into a Le Preamp, the line output into your soundcard and that's it. With the included Torpedo Wall of Sound III plugin, you can then achieve the sound in your head with ease. Many parameters influence the sound of your rig when it comes to recording. Taking good care of cabinet selection and mic'ing will dramatically improve the sound of your takes. The Torpedo simulation reproduces the tiniest variations of cabinet behaviour, such as frequency response and distortion. Move the microphone in the virtual studio room thanks to the Torpedo IR synthesis, control the phase with the Variphi: all the settings you need to achieve great recordings are here. You can even record silently late at night."

Q What new products can we look forward to from Two notes?

"We want to offer some additional preamps, but the different models are not yet fully defined. I can say that we're very interested in the acoustic world, while Le Bass, our most successful pedal, could soon have a brother with quite a different voicing. We also want to work on a couple of original effects, but as we have so many projects going on it's hard to decide which one will be out first."

Monochrome minimalism from **Rhys Jones**

Three modulation flavours on **Colin Wilson Lamb**'s board

Strymon's Mobius takes centre stage for **Garth Ware**

Fuzz great and small from **Paul Richard Kimble**

Gregory Nguyena Ba goes widescreen

Check out **Matt Gum**'s Boosta Grande clean boost

#READERBOARDS

Would you like to see your pedalboard in print? Post your pictures on Instagram or on our Facebook page using the hashtag #readerboards

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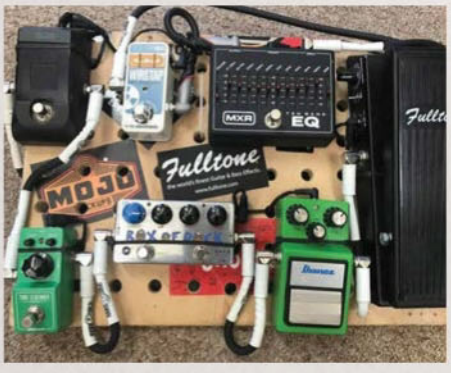
3x Strymon, 2x Red Witch, we like **Dan Hayston**'s style...

Nick Shaw sporting an MXR Classic 108 Fuzz & Dyna Comp

Charles Tieskotter's homage to Pink Floyd



Why settle for one Tube Screamer, **Josh Flippo**?

Colour-matched excellence from **Brendan Newman**

Eventide supplying the magic on **Serch Ortega**'s board

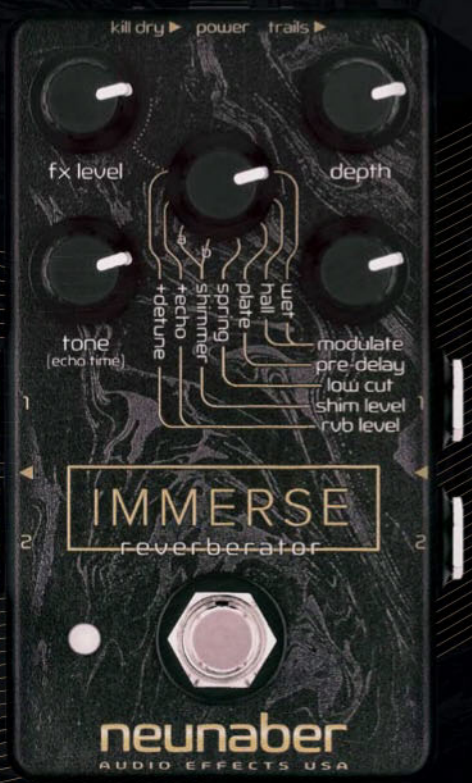
emma electronic | SUPREME CIRCUITS FOR SUPREME SOUNDS

Making some of the most fun and awesome-sounding pedals known to music-kind, Emma Electronic may well be one of Denmark's best kept sonic secrets!

The **DiscumBOBulator** still stands as a true landmark in the auto-wah world, just look at the rigs of Ida Nielsen, Pino Palladino or Adrian Belew for a testimony to that, but Emma has also churned out some of the most ambitious amp-like drive pedals throughout the years.

The pedal names may be hard to pronounce, but the tones are more than easy to love!

emmaelectronic.com



this is ~~not~~ a toy

The Immerse Reverberator houses eight stellar stereo reverbs — Wet, hall, plate & spring reverbs, two shimmers, Wet+echo, and Wet+detune. Each effect has been painstakingly crafted: there are no fillers here. Delivering unrivaled sound quality and no-nonsense flexibility in a compact footprint, the Immerse shines in any situation and with any instrument.

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